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## Carlo Botta: A Foreigner's View Of the American Revolution

Maurice Jackson

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### Incontri e dialogo tra Italia e Messico: la doppia prospettiva storica e culturale

a cura di

Patrizia Spinato Bruschi e Ana María González Luna C.

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## Carlo Botta: A Foreigner's View Of the American Revolution

Maurice Jackson

In his first volume on the United States, Carlo Botta makes an interesting observation.

In these provinces also, the slavery of the blacks, which was in use, seemed, however strange the assertion may appear, to have increased the love of liberty among the white populations. Having continually before their eyes, the living picture of the miserable condition of man reduced to slavery, they could better appreciate the liberty they enjoyed. This liberty they considered not merely as a right but as a franchise and privilege<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, that is the central theme of one of the most celebrated books in modern American history, Edmund S. Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom*<sup>2</sup>. Botta did not have the full range of materials that Morgan had to draw his conclusions. The colonists felt that they were subject to political slavery. They felt that to ensure their liberty, the subjugation of the African was warranted and justified. They feared for their own freedom but were never worried about being kidnapped, brutally enchained or raped as the enslaved Africans were. Yet they used the word slavery to describe their condition and to make clear that they would not allow the British to treat them as they themselves treated Blacks.

Benjamin Throop speaking of the Stamp Act imposed by the British said in 1766 that the colonist would go «from a state of perfect freedom»<sup>3</sup> to «the greatest slavery and bondage»<sup>4</sup>. John Dickinson said in 1768 «Those who are taxed without their own consent, expressed by themselves or the representatives, are slaves. We are taxed with-

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<sup>1</sup> Carlo BOTTA, *History of the War of Independence of the United States of America*, New Haven, Nathan Whiting, 1837, 1, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund S. MORGAN, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin THROOP, "A Thanksgiving Sermon, Upon the occasion, of the Glorious News of the Repeal of the Stamp Act", New London, Conn., 1760, p. 13, quoted in Felix NWABUEZE OKOYE, "Chattel Slavery as Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries", in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 37, 1980, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

out our own consent, expressed by ourselves, or our representatives. We are therefore SLAVES»<sup>5</sup>. Josiah Quincy Jr said in 1774: «I speak it with grief – I speak it with anguish – Britons are out oppressors: I speak it with shame – I speak it with indignation – WE ARE SLAVES»<sup>6</sup>. Finally Alexander Hamilton envisioned in 1774 that the absolute sovereignty of the British Parliament meant «absolute slavery»<sup>7</sup> for the Americans. These men said little about chattel slavery – the forced subjugation of an entire race of people – the enslaved African, men women and children. The Virginia colony brought in John Smith to impose military discipline on the white colonists and in a roundabout way disproved the racist notions that only blacks were able to work long hours in the hot sun.

Blacks too, although enslaved, held the love for liberty just as dearly as did whites. And from the very beginning they sought to claim those rights that Botta wrote about. At the time of the American Revolution there was a total population of 2,600,000 people in British Mainland North America, of which 500,000 were Black. Slavery was common throughout the thirteen colonies. The proportion of slaves in the local population ranged from 5 percent in the mid-Atlantic colonies of New England and Pennsylvania to 10 percent in New York and New Jersey. Slaves represented about 33 percent in the Chesapeake region, North Carolina, and Georgia. In South Carolina slaves actually formed a majority of the population. After Washington, DC became the capital of the United States, in 1790-91 almost most half of the nation's slaves resided in DC, Maryland and Virginia, the areas surrounding the capital.

According to Gail Buckley «Some five thousand blacks served under George Washington, and about a thousand, mostly Southern runaways, fought for George III»<sup>8</sup>. She adds «although the percentage of the black population who served was small, by 1779 as many as one in seven members of Washington's never very large army were

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<sup>5</sup> John DICKINSON, "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies", Philadelphia, 1768, p. 38, quoted in Felix NWABUEZE OKOYE, "Chattel Slavery as Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries", p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Josiah QUINCY Jr., "Observation on the Act of Parliament Commonly Called the Boston Port Bill; With Thoughts on Civil Society and Standing Armies", Boston, 1774, p. 69, quoted in Felix NWABUEZE OKOYE, "Chattel Slavery as Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries", p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander HAMILTON, "A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress", New York, 1774, p. 4, quoted in Felix NWABUEZE OKOYE, "Chattel Slavery as Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries", p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Gail BUCKLEY, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolutionary War to Desert Storm*, New York, Random House, 2001, pp. 5-6.

black»<sup>9</sup>. The American Revolution was a potential threat to slavery in America. The British and the Americans eventually came to deploy slaves as soldiers: in 1775 the Earl of Dunmore, the governor of Virginia, made an offer to free slaves owned by Loyalist who would fight for the British side. That promise led many slaves to join combatants on both sides.

Many Blacks fought with their feet. John Hope Franklin tells us that «Thomas Jefferson estimated that in 1778 alone more than 30,000 Virginia slaves ran away. David Ramsay, South Carolina historian asserted that between 1775 and 1783 his state lost at least 25,000 Blacks. It has been estimated that Georgia lost about 75 percent of its 15,000 slaves»<sup>10</sup>. Jefferson would later estimate that up to one sixth of Virginia's slaves fled during the war years. In the struggle for freedom 'the contagion of liberty' knew no bound. The enslaved developed their own rhetorical freedom themes with music, words, rituals and sermons. To paraphrase the words of Herbert Aptheker, one of the first historians to document the resistance struggles of Enslaved Africans: «The central theme of African American history is the struggle for freedom»<sup>11</sup>. This struggle included members of the African Diaspora throughout the Americas. Thus the Paradox: a history of liberty, a history of slavery with one in five human beings enslaved in 1776.

It has been well-documented the many justifications that were used to enslave black people, among them: skin color, race and religion, all of which made the black hearten and less than human. Even well meaning men like Bartolomé de las Casas, the Bishop of Chiapas, who came to find the enslavement of the indigenous, Native American peoples offensive, could nevertheless justify the enslavement of the African, arguing that their temperament best suited for hard labor. His words were used by proslavery proponents to justify their actions.

W.E.B. DuBois, the magisterial voice of those formerly enslaved, wrote «the rough and brutal character of the time and place was partly responsible for this [harsh punishment for rebellious slaves], but a more decisive reason lay in the fierce and turbulent character

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> John Hope FRANKLIN, Alfred A. MOSS, *From Slavery to Freedom History of African Americans*, New York, McGraw Hill, 2000<sup>8</sup>, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert APTHEKER, *The Central Theme of Southern History: A Re-Examination, in Afro-American History: The Modern Era*, Secaucus (NJ), The Citadel Press, 1971, pp. 17-27.

of the imported Negroes»<sup>12</sup>. He added «the docility to which long years of bondage and strict discipline gave rise was absent, and insurrections and acts of violence were of frequent occurrence»<sup>13</sup>.

Quoting from the Slave Codes of South Carolina and the Quaker Abolitionist Anthony Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Africa*, Du-Bois documented the «rapid importation»<sup>14</sup> of Africans, harsh slave conditions and the danger whites faced. This fear of discontented Blacks caused their captors to impose even harsher conditions and penalties on their captives. It was this fear, not concern for enslaved Africans that in part caused whites to seek biblical reasoning and un-dying support for their deeds. Some historians have labeled their actions 'paternalistic'. Yet, the masters treated the slaves more like beasts than children. Others tried to find a 'benevolent' strain amongst the whites. Yet, there was nothing kind, charitable or sacrificial about their actions. They did not bring Africans to the new world to 'save' and 'civilize' them but to exploit and oppress them, in order to turn a profit. With a Bible in one hand and a book of Justinian codes and philosophical tracts in the other, whites kidnapped untold tens of millions of Africans without guilt. And untold millions died during the horrible 'middle passage'. Slavery, with the blood of the Africans dripping across the Atlantic Ocean, sapped the life out of the Blacks and robbed the whites of their souls and their humanity.

The slaves first showed resistance to their imposed slavery, aboard the slave ships, as they were kidnapped and forcibly taken to the new world. Many Africans starved themselves by refusing to eat even though the crewmen tried to force-feed them. At other times, the whites muzzled them like dogs, chaining them, one atop the other. Some slaves jumped overboard, choosing to die, rather than to be beaten, raped and possibly dismembered. They believed that in death the 'transmigration of the soul' in African tradition would allow them a final freedom. One they could not find in life. While these first acts of resistance were most often individual in nature, the minute an additional slave took such action, they represented an early collective consciousness, against forced enslavement. And so, from the first day of captivity until the final slave was manumitted in Brazil in 1888, the enslaved Africans fought against their captivity and their oppression, any way they could. Whether they resisted as individuals, or as members of a collective, there was at all times a most

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<sup>12</sup> William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1898, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibi*, p. 5.



common thread amongst the enslaved Africans: the yearning for freedom. The struggle to end slavery took many forms, from open resistance by the enslaved Africans to high philosophical ideas from European Enlightenment era thinkers. Oddly enough, as with any quest for freedom and dignity, those forms would often pass each slave on the journey; sometimes speaking but most of the time not. Many whites who wanted to end the slave trade and even slavery had no desire to win equality for the Blacks. William Nell, one of the first great African American historians, wrote in 1855 about a well-known anecdote<sup>15</sup> dating to the American Revolutionary War. When General John Sullivan of New Hampshire told his slave that the whites were forming an Army «to fight for liberty»<sup>16</sup>, the Black «shrewdly suggested that it would be a great satisfaction to know they he was indeed going to fight for *his* liberty»<sup>17</sup>. So «struck with the reasonableness and justice of this suggestion, Gen. S. at once gave him his freedom»<sup>18</sup>. Legend has it that in another mainland colony a Black man, upon seeing his master grab his firearm to fight the British, mustered his own gun. The 'master' admonished the 'slave' asking indignantly, «boy where are you going with that gun?» The enslaved African forcibly answered «master, I want my freedom just like you want yours». Crispus Attucks, a 6'2" man, whose father was said to be African and mother Natick Indian, heard the call of the American patriots and joined with a force of 50 to confront British forces at Boston Harbor and help start the American Revolution. Attucks calmly told his fellow revolutionaries «don't be afraid» as he was one of five men killed in the confrontation now known as the Boston Massacre. John Adams, the future second President called the men «a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and molattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tars»<sup>19</sup>. Adams also understood the role of Attucks as he said «this Attucks (...) appears to have undertaken to be the hero of the night; and to lead this Army, with banners»<sup>20</sup>. Adams clearly knew the significance of Attuck's color as he proclaimed that Attucks stood at the «head of such a rabble of Ne-

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<sup>15</sup>William C. NELL, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, New York, Arno Press and the New York Time, 1968, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibi*, 119-120.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibi*, 120.

<sup>19</sup> *Speech by John Adams at the Boston Massacre Trial*, Legal Papers of John Adams, No. 64. Rex v. Wemms, pp. 260-270. Tuesday, nine o'Clock, the Court met according to adjournment, and Mr. ADAMS.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

groes, & c. as they can collect together»<sup>21</sup>. At Attucks's funeral-10,000 of 16,000 showed up.

The famed British writer Samuel Johnson, noting the contradiction between the American Revolutionaries desires for their liberty and the continued enslavement of the Africans sarcastically proclaimed «how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes»<sup>22</sup>. The Revolutionary War also awakened antislavery contingents; the spirit of liberty that moved white Americans to independence had affected their thinking about blacks. Many slaves were freed through the ransoming or benevolence of their owners, while a good many others successfully escaped to set up Maroon communities. Some states also made moves toward the abolition of slavery: Vermont entered the union as a free state in 1777, and Massachusetts and Pennsylvania passed laws toward the emancipation of their own slaves. Even in the Chesapeake region, home to at least half the blacks in the United States, some whites advocated the abolition of slavery. Conclusion: Benjamin Rush: «The American war is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution (...) Nothing but the first act of the drama is closed»<sup>23</sup>. A second revolution will be the Civil War.

As far back as 1688, the Quakers of Germantown (Philadelphia) Pennsylvania had taken the first organized activity by whites against slavery. In the *Germantown Protest* they laid bare their arguments against slavery declaring «these are the reasons why we are against the traffic of men-body as followeth. Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner viz, to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life?»<sup>24</sup>. But it was not until the Quaker *Epistle of 1754*, over 60 years after the *Germantown Protest*, with a «proposal of making that Rule of our Discipline respecting the Importation of Negroes or the Purchasing of them after imported, more public, together with some reasons to discourage that practice»<sup>25</sup> that Quakers took any official actions against their members slaveholding. Finally,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel JOHNSON, "Taxation not Tyranny; an answer to the Resolutions ad Address of the American Congress (1775)", in *The works of Samuel Johnson*, London, printed by Luke Hansard & sons, 1810, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin RUSH, *Letter to Price*, May 25, 1786.

<sup>24</sup> J. WILLIAM FROST, "Germantown Protest (1688)" quoted in *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, edited with an Introduction by J. William Frost, Norwood (Pa), Norwood Editions, 1980, p. 69-70. See also Junius P. RODRIGUEZ, *Slavery in the United States: a social, political, and historical encyclopaedia*, edited by Junius P. Rodriguez, Santa Barbara (CA), ABC-CLIO, 2, p. 532.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibi*, pp. 167-169.

in 1776, at the Philadelphia Annual Meeting it was declared that ownership of slaves was incompatible with membership in the Society of Friends (Quakers) that final action was taken against their own slaveholders. This condemnation was the culmination of almost 100 years of Quaker actions and inactions. Thus, if the battle against slavery was so difficult even for the Quakers, who were the leading organization against the institution, one could imagine the difficulty within society as a whole throughout the Atlantic world. It took men like Anthony Benezet and his continental cohorts, Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and John Wesley in England, Condorcet and members of the Société des Amis de Noirs in France and newly freed Africans like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana, to prove the fallacy of the Bishop's logic. Indeed these men showed proof that «before the Europeans came the Africans lived in peace»<sup>26</sup> and harmony and worked to produce what they needed before the advent of slavery and commodity production.

### *Some Sources of Antislavery Thought*

Just as slave revolts appeared in 'waves' in the words of Aptheker, so did intellectual ideas used to combat slavery. The years from the mid 1750s until the 1780s, just after the American Revolutionary war, provide such an era. It was Charles-Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755) who gave the antislavery forces their initial enlightened voice against slavery. Montesquieu observed in *Espirit des Lois* (1748) that:

the state of slavery is in its own nature bad. It is neither useful to the master nor to the slave; not to the slave because he can do nothing through a motive of virtue; nor to the master because by having an unlimited authority over his slaves he insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral values, and then becomes fierce, hasty, severe, choleric, voluptuous, and cruel<sup>27</sup>.

Among the most cited western thinkers was the famed University of Glasgow Professor, Frances Hutcheson. His *System of Moral Phi-*

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter 4, Maurice JACKSON, *Let This Voice Be Heard, Anthony Benezet Father of Atlantic Abolitionism*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, pps.72-107.

<sup>27</sup> Baron de MONTESQUIEU, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, chap. 1, p. 246, (first edition, Paris, 1748, Book 15).

*losophy* (1755) insisted that Blacks as human beings had never forfeited their freedom, and were therefore entitled to the same liberty, happiness and benevolence as were the Europeans. Proclaiming that «no endowments, natural or acquired, can give a perfect right to assume power over others, without their consent (...) the subject must have a right of resistance, as the trust is broken, beside the manifest plea of necessity»<sup>28</sup>.

Many antislavery leaders like Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush in the mainland colonies and Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and John Wesley in Britain agreed with Hutcheson in his condemnation against slavery. However, these men differed on the 'right to resistance' by the slaves fearing violent revolts.

The Scottish jurist George Wallace also gave an intellectual compass to freedom's cause. The son of a legendary Scottish barrister, Wallace's major work was *A System of the Principle of the Law of Scotland* (1760). He argued «all that inequality, which is to be found among the human race, is derived from political and arbitrary institutions alone (...) all inequality, all dependence, all servility, all superiority, all subjugation, all pre-eminence, which is not necessary to the welfare of Society, is unnatural; and that if it could, it ought to be destroyed»<sup>29</sup>. Like Hutcheson, he went further and challenged the right of one person to hold another human being as chattel arguing that any slave or transaction of human flesh was «ipso jure void»<sup>30</sup>. His most potent claim in *System* and one used by antislavery leaders in America, Britain and France was that:

Men and their liberty are not in commerce; they are not either saleable or purchasable...for everyone of those unfortunate men are pretended to be slaves, has a right to be declared free, for he never lost his liberty; he could not lose it; his Prince had no power to dispose of him<sup>31</sup>.

The third of these Scottish moral philosophers was James Foster who in *Discourse on all the Principle Branches of Natural Religion and Social Virtue* (1749), proclaimed that chattel slavery «is much more criminal, and a more outrageous violation of *natural rights* than

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<sup>28</sup> Frances HUTCHESON, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, (1755) Book 2, chap. 5. sec. II, pp, 271, 301 (Reprint New York, Augustus M. Kelley, 1968).

<sup>29</sup> George WALLACE, *A System of the Principles of the Laws of Scotland*, Edinburgh, W. Millar, 1760, pp. 95-97.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

preceding forms of slavery»<sup>32</sup>. In essence he served to rebut those that made exception for the enslavement of Africans. Foster was also one of the first philosophers to argue against slavery, countering the religious arguments of Christian thinkers writing that «we sacrifice reason, our humanity, our Christianity, to an *unnatural sordid gain*»<sup>33</sup>. Of course, the gain he referred to was the drive for maximum profits. Seeing that slavery debased the morals of his fellowmen he argued that «we teach other nations to despise, and trample under foot, all the obligations of *social virtue* (...) and prevent the propagation of the *Gospel* by representing it as a scheme of *power* and *barbarous* oppression and the enemy of the *natural* privileges and rights of men»<sup>34</sup>.

Adam Smith, the Scottish philosopher and political economist first weighed in on the issue of slavery in 1759 with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. However, it was in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that he made his real imprint into the antislavery dialogue. He believed that from an economic standpoint slavery was simply not profitable within the free market system. It reduced the incentive of the master because it did not force him to seek new productive methods. It made poor use of fertile land. It made whites lazy because it did not encourage them to work. After all, their labor was their own and they were 'free' to sell it, yet they could not sell it because the forced slave labor of the Blacks negated the value of the white men's labor. Smith wrote that «The freedom of the free was the cause of the great oppression of the slaves». Speaking of the love of profit he wrote that «this love of domination and tyrannizing, I say, will make it impossible for the slaves in a free country ever to recover their liberty»<sup>35</sup>.

Thomas Clarkson in *An Essay on the impolicy of the African Slave Trade, in Two Parts* (1788) had shown that slave traders had lost money and more importantly innumerable white lives aboard slave trading vessels. Men like Clarkson and Benezet strived to show that slavery distorted the white soul just as it mangled the Black body.

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<sup>32</sup> James FOSTER, *Discourses on All the Principal Branches of the Natural Religion and Social Virtue*, London, 1749, I, pp. 158-159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> Adam SMITH, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations, 1776, Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds. Ronald L. MEEK, David Daiches RAPHAEL, Peter STEIN, Clarendon Press, 1978, [A], III, 103; [A], III, 114.

Above all he believed slavery cost more than using free labor and he showed how it stalled the white's drive for maximum profits.

Many proslavery forces during the Age of Revolutions (1776-1848) found in the Americas and on the Continent their intellectual justification in the works of John Locke. Although Locke died in 1704, his ideas were ingrained in proslavery propaganda. Locke believed that in most cases the institution of slavery arose as the natural condition of the inferiors. He argued in *Second Treatises of Governments* (1689) that «slavery is so vile and miserable an Estate of Man, and so directly opposite the generous Temper and Courage, of our nation; that 'tis hardly to be conceived that an *Englishman*, much less a *Gentleman*, should plead for it»<sup>36</sup>. Yet he and his fellow English Gentlemen did plead for slavery. Locke who owned stock in the Royal African Company, justified slavery with a clause in the Fundamental Constitution of the South Carolina Colony (1669) stating that «every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over Negro slaves, of what opinion or Religion soever»<sup>37</sup>.

Another philosopher of the time, the Scotsman David Hume, wrote in his essay *Of Natural Characters* (1748, 1754) that «there never was a civilized nation of any complexion other than white, nor an individual eminent in action or speculation»<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, conservative thinkers like Edmund Burke implicitly challenged the notion of absolute authority in relation to slavery. Burke wrote «if we undertake to govern the inhabitants of such a country, we must govern them upon their own principles and maxims, and not upon ours»<sup>39</sup>. Burke was voicing a notion that could be applied to any subject people. Showing the contradiction of antislavery leaders who relied solely on their philosophical training or political bent, he pronounced his opposition to the French revolution, French abolitionist actions and British radicalism. Burke declared in 1792, just as the first British parliamentary debates on the Slave trade were debated, «the cause of humanity would be far more benefited by the continuance of the

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<sup>36</sup> John LOCKE, *Two Treatises of Government*, a critical edition with an introduction and apparatus criticus by Peter Laslett, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas COOPER, David James MCCORD, *Statues at Large of South Carolina*, I, p. 55.

<sup>38</sup> David HUME, "Of National Characters, from Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding", in Emmanuel Chukwudi EZE, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Cambridge (MA), Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Edmund BURKE, *Trial of Warren Hastings, Esquire. Third day, 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1788, Works and Correspondence of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, London, Rivingtons, 1852, VII, p. 309.

trade and servitude, regulated and reformed, than by the total destruction of both or either»<sup>40</sup>.

In short, many leaders in the colonies and Britain and France could challenge some aspects of slavery. But when antislavery ideas joined forces with those that wanted more radical social reforms, conservative men, even those with antislavery ideals, put those ideas in the background. Yet, the philosophical debate over slavery at times found the French absolutist thinker Jean Bodin and the English conservative scholar Edmund Burke in basic agreement with Montesquieu and more radical Scottish thinkers, like Hutcheson and Wallace. These ideas placed great social responsibilities on humankind. They traveled from Bodin to the men who fought in the English Revolution, to the Quakers, the American and the French Revolutionaries to the leader in Saint Domingue.

Revolutionary ideals were at the center of the French *Encyclopédie*, which, according to Diderot, was to collect the knowledge collected on the surface of the earth, and to unfold its general system. In volume XVI published in 1765, chevalier Louis de Jaucourt, wrote *Traites des Negres*. Jaucourt took the words almost verbatim from George Wallace, just as John Wesley took most of his *Thoughts on Slavery* (1774) from Anthony Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea*. And when Jaucourt so liberally borrowed from Wallace, ideas of reason, science and of 'human rights' spread throughout the learned Atlantic community:

there is not a single one of these hapless souls-who, we maintain, are but slaves-who does not have a right to be declared free, since he never lost his freedom, since it was impossible for him to lose it, and since neither his ruler nor his father nor anyone else had the right to dispose of his freedom: consequently, the sale of this person is null and void in and of itself; this Negro does not divest himself; indeed cannot under any condition divest himself of his natural rights; he carries them everywhere with him, and he has a right to demand that others allow him to enjoy these rights. Therefore, it is a clear case of inhumanity on that part of the judges in those free countries which the slave is shipped, not to free the slaves instantly by legal declaration sine he is their brother, having a soul like theirs<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Edmund BURKE, "Letter to the Right Hon. Henry Dundas", Easter-Monday Night, 1792, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, London, Rivingtons, 1812, IX, p. 281.

<sup>41</sup> Louis chevalier de JAUCOURT, "Traites des Negres", in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts des métiers*, Neufchatel, chez Samuel

These ideas were rational, secular, and religious. They were about the freedom of the whites as well as the Blacks. Many of these ideas were transmitted on both sides of the Atlantic through men like Benezet, who was both French and American, and best summed up these thoughts in *Notes on the Slave Trade* (1783): «liberty is the right of every human being, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no human law can deprive him of the right which he derives from the law of nature»<sup>42</sup>.

A little later the Haitian Revolution occurred. In his classic *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James noted the profound influence and enduring significance of the Haitian Revolution, the momentous struggle that began in 1791 and yielded the first post-colonial independent black nation and the only nation to gain independence through slave rebellion:

The revolt is the only successful slave revolt in history, and the odds it had to overcome is evidence of the magnitude of the interests that were involved. The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organize themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement<sup>43</sup>.

The United States, especially Thomas Jefferson, never could accept this revolution. The movie actor Danny Glover got it right as he spoke about his film project on Toussaint:

Toussaint led the only successful slave rebellion in history and in the process defeated Napoleon's army, as well as the imperial armies of Britain and Spain. It's an amazing story in part because it rounds out what we know about the United States and French Revolutions. The United States revolution brought the Declaration of Independence, the French revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man. The Haitian Revolution represents the third leg: universalizing these principles to all men – not just privileged, landed, wealthy men of European ancestry. In terms of world historical movements and revolutions, it was actually the most important of the three because it ex-

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Faulche, 1751-1765, XVI, p. 532, quoted from David BRION DAVIS, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1966, p. 416.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony BENEZET, *Notes on the Slave Trade*, Philadelphia, Enoch Story, 1783, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Cyril Lionel Robert JAMES, *The Black Jacobins, Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, New York, Vintage, 1963<sup>2</sup>, p. ix.



tended the ideals enshrined in the American and French Revolutions<sup>44</sup>.

*Revolts and Revolutionaries: They «came in waves»<sup>45</sup>*

Herbert Aptheker argued in *American Negro Slave Revolts* that slave revolts often «came in waves». Such were the examples of the event in the mainland colonies and the Caribbean in the middle of the 18th century and the early to middle 19th century. When he wrote this he was roundly criticized for exaggeration and for finding a slave revolt 'under every rock' or every time three Blacks gathered. He was also criticized because it had an openly Marxist bent, using both a class (materialist) analysis and one that showed the self agency of the oppressed. Aptheker also listed what he termed «precipitants and (...) other causes of rebellion»<sup>46</sup>, linking the hardness of plantation labor and slave punishment and the political and economic climate with existing social conditions. As Eugene Genovese wrote in *Roll Jordan Roll*, some 30 years after, «Aptheker demolished the legend of the contented slave (...) and unearthed much evidence of insurrection, maroon activity, and other forms of physical resistance and compelled a new departure in the historiography»<sup>47</sup>. Indeed a brief look at several interrelated slave revolts shows that the links in the fight against oppression were as conjoined as those which held that oppression together.

In 1737, a revolt in Antigua shook both the Caribbean and the mainland colonies. This was documented by one proslavery writer who wrote the catching of «the King, that is, he who was to have been King of the Blacks, had the plot succeeded»<sup>48</sup>. This planned revolt became well known throughout the British Empire. The authorities meted out extreme punishment to discourage future revolts. King and General were titles given to the plot's leaders, who gave orders to kill all the whites. The Antiguan Blacks living closely to-

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Maurice JACKSON and Jacqueline BACON, eds., *African Americans and The Haitian Revolution: Selected Essay and Historical Documents*, New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Herbert APTHEKER, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1943.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibi*, Chapter 4, pp. 79-113.

<sup>47</sup> Eugene GENOVESE, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made*, New York, Vintage Books, 1972, p. 597.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Anthony BENEZET, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes*, Philadelphia, W. Dunlap, 1762, p. 58.

gether on the small island had retained their 'Africanism' longer than many of the slaves in the mainland colonies and used their links with their African past to plot for their freedom. They represent the model established by Eugene Genovese, of «restorationist»<sup>49</sup> rebels as those who sought to restore the African state of being and African state of mind. What shook the authorities even more was that Will, one of the Antiguan leaders, ended up in New York in 1741 and played a major role in its revolt. According to the 1741 trial record, the *Journal of the Proceedings*, kept by one of the Judges, Daniel Horsmanden, a slave named «Ward's Negro – testified – that this criminal has within a few years past, been concerned in two conspiracies in the West Indies, the first at St. John's, the last at Antigua, in the year 1736 where (as it was said) he became an evidence, and from thence he was shipped to this city»<sup>50</sup>. Will had been accused of begin involved in the plot but also of informing on 88 of his fellow Antiguan conspirators, and he was transported to New York. Slave masters, fearing the lost of profits did not often resisted a death penalty for their slaves choosing to sell and transport them to other slave-holding regions.

The Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina was the largest slave revolt in colonial North America. With a population of 56,000 people, Blacks outnumbered whites by almost two to one. Just as the British leader Lord Dunmore offered freedom to slaves in 1774 during the American Revolutionary war, the Spanish in Florida offered 'liberty' to slaves in British possession. Enslaved Africans hearing of this offer conspired to run away to Spanish lands. On Sunday, September 9, 1739, 20 slaves seized a store, executed its owners and burned several plantations. Led by an African slave, Jemmy, and proclaiming 'liberty' they gathered at St. Paul's Parish and moved south picking up recruits as they marched and burned plantations as they descended south, killing more than 25 whites. Being outnumbered by the heavily armed militia, they were captured a few days later. In the end, 44 of the insurgents were killed or hung. Many of their heads were placed on a pike at the entrance to the city port as

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<sup>49</sup> Eugene D. GENOVESE, *From rebellion to revolution: Afro-American slave revolts in the making of the modern world*, Baton Rouge (LA), Louisiana University Press, 1979, p. 82.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel HORSMANDEN, *The New York Slave Conspiracy*, New York, Beacon Press, 1771, pp. 265-266, reprint of 1744 edition. See also Thomas J. DAVIS *A Rumor of Revolt: "The Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York*, Amherst Mass, University of Massachusetts Press, 1985 and Serena R. ZABIN, ed., *The New York Conspiracy Trials of 1741: Daniel Horsmanden's Journal of the Proceedings and Related Documents*, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

was later done in New York<sup>51</sup>. Many of the 32,000 slaves came from Angola. They spoke the same languages or dialects and were able to communicate secretly with each other. Some of the slaves were said to have been trained in the use of firearms and military regimen by the Portuguese. Some had been taught the tenets of Catholicism by their Portuguese captors. They were also proficient in rice production, the South Carolinas staple, just as they had been in Angola<sup>52</sup>.

Some four years after the events in Antigua and two years after the uprisings in South Carolina, the 'rumor of revolt' swept New York City in the first few months of 1741. The paranoia that overwhelmed the city lasted from May 11 until August 29. Historians are divided over whether the events that so engrossed the city constituted a real slave revolt, white hysteria, or a criminal conspiracy. The city had a population of 11,000 of which 20 percent were Black. Because of the 'long winter' of 1740-1741, the War of Jenkins Ear, (Britain against Spain) and the inability for normal trade because of the freezing of the Hudson River, tensions were high. In 1741, a 'combination of villains' made up of groups of enslaved and free Africans, indentured Dutch, British and Irish servants; Irish, Cuban, and West Indian sailors, along with Haitian 'voodoo priests' and African Obeah and several Dutchmen 'conspired' to revolt against the New York authorities. As in other slave rebellions, the slave knew where the center of authority and the munitions armories were, and attacked Ft. George. The conspirators set a number of fires over a ten day period. White merchants claimed to have heard Blacks scream the words: «Fire, Fire, Scorch, Scorch, A LITTLE, damn it, BY-AND BY»<sup>53</sup>. The New York conspirators had planned to name a King and a General just as they had in Antigua. In New York, in a reverse of positions for Blacks and whites, the General was an Akan, (from southern Ghana) named Caesar and the General, a Dutchman named John Hughson. 30 slaves were executed, 13 Blacks were quartered and burned at the stake, and 17 others were hanged. Four whites were hanged and their bodies, along with the Blacks were left to rot in public at the entry ports of the city, so as to strike fear in other would be conspi-

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<sup>51</sup> Peter WOOD, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1972.

<sup>52</sup> John THORNTON, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion", in *America Historical Review*, XCVI, 4 (October 1991), pp. 1101-1113.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel HORSMANDEN, *The New York Conspiracy*, ed and with an introduction by Thomas J. Davis, Boston, Beacon Press, 1971, p. 27. Reprint of Daniel HORSMANDEN, *A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with Negro and other Slaves, for Burning the City of New York in America, and Murdering the Inhabitants*, New York, 1744.

rators. Over 70 people had been expelled from the city and 200 others were questioned and arrested. By the end of the events with similarities to the Salem, Massachusetts witch trials of 1692, over 200 people had been arrested and harassed. Whereas in Stono, the authorities did all they could to keep the matter silent, in New York, the trials and hysteria made the events known thorough the western Atlantic world. Yet like Stono, the events were in part blamed on the high concentration of Blacks in the city.

The demographics of the 1,429 slaves in the city shifted drastically after the revolt. Prior to the events of 1741, 70 percent of the slaves had come from the West Indies and the other 30 percent from Africa. At the end of the trials only 30 percent of the slaves arrived in New York from the West Indies with the other 70 percent coming directly from Africa. This was the opposite of what happened in South Carolina, where slaves directly from African had led the protests. This was caused by the authorities' fear that other rebellious Blacks transported from Jamaica and Antigua would again end up in the city. Indeed, if goods could travel across Atlantic waters, so could ideas, revolutionary ideas about freedom.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gabriel's revolt was influenced both by the ideals of the American and Haitian revolutions. Gabriel Prosser (ca 1776-1800) lived in Henrico County, Virginia, near Richmond, the capital city. A blacksmith by training, and a man who taught himself to read the bible, he was well versed in the revolutionary rhetoric of the period. He began to recruit, arm and train slaves Richmond. Seizing the treasury and the armory, in late August, he freed prisoners and prepared for open revolt. But the weather (a severe thunderstorm) and fearful slaves, who revealed his plot to the whites, betrayed him. The whites quickly armed and mobilized themselves and in the next day or so arrested hundreds of slaves. Gabriel was able to escape with the help of a white antislavery Methodist ship captain, by hiding aboard a schooner in Norfolk, many miles by foot to the south. However, he was soon betrayed by two of the ships crewman, who collected the \$300.00 reward. Gabriel was soon, along with 26 other slaves, quickly convicted of insurrection and executed on October 7, 1800. Many others were jailed for long periods. As they would whenever revolt or fear of revolt occurred, the authorities tightened existing laws and prevented Blacks from gathering, praying or reading together.

The next large revolt came in 1822 in and around Charleston, South Carolina, a major southern seaport. The revolt was led by Denmark Vessey (ca 1767-1822) who was said by some to have

been born in Africa and by others in St. Thomas. Vessey had also spent considerable time on ships, as the slave of the Bermuda slave trader Joseph Vessey and when his master settled in Charleston he remained with him. As a trusted slave in an urban setting, he experienced 'relative freedom'. He won the Bay Street Lottery in 1800 and with the \$600 purchased his 'real freedom'. There were already about 1,000 free Blacks in the city. The number would rise to 3,600 by 1822. Most worked on the docks, as apprentices to tradesmen, or as house servants. The majority of the 260,000 slaves still worked, as they had in 1739, in the rice fields. By 1822, Denmark had accumulated around \$8,000, along with seven wives and countless children. Like Prosser, he was a literate man and had accumulated some wealth. Like Prosser, he longed for information about the events of his time, and was well versed in the rhetoric about rights, freedom and liberties, from the American and French Revolutions and about the heroic actions of the men and women in Haiti. He also knew about the discord among white Americans over the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state (free of slavery). Deciding that his freedom meant nothing, as long as his brethren remained enslaved, he organized a revolt, quickly mobilizing fellow tradesmen while secretly meeting in Black churches. It was said that as many as 9,000 Blacks were involved in the plot. But just as with the earlier Prosser plot, he was betrayed by fearful slaves. On July 2, he was captured and executed along with 34 other coconspirators. 37 others were sent out of the state. The authorities, fearful of another revolt, clamped down on the Blacks, especially free Blacks. The legislature quickly passed a series of Seamen Acts, requiring all seamen to be jailed as long as their ships were docked or in port. Similar acts were passed throughout the south. The greatest fear which stuck with the whites was that Blacks had invited people in Haiti to join the rebellion and Vessey's escape plan involved going to the Island.

The last of the three major mainland revolts occurred in Southampton, Virginia, starting on February 31, 1831 and was led by Nat Turner (1800-1831). Turner's mother had come from Africa only 7 years before his birth and told him often of her native land. Known as an eccentric and a God-fearing zealot, he had tried to escape in 1821 only to be recaptured and severely punished. But his experience led him to believe that his calling was to lead his people to freedom. Turner organized through the Black church going to church and camp meetings throughout the area to organize his plot. He became ill on the day the plot was to begin, August 13. The revolt was

postponed until August 22. Beginning with five slaves, with another 75 or so joining along the way they moved from plantation to plantation, and house to house killing more than 60 whites. However, the whites quickly organized a well armed militia which soon defeated the rebels. In the end, more than 100 Blacks were killed. Turner escaped to the swamps of Dismal Creek near Norfolk, Virginia, a site of a previous maroon community. Captured a month later Turner was hung on November 11, 1831, but his name stayed alive with the publication of his account titled *Nat Turners Confessions*.

All three of the rebellions involved careful planning by charismatic and learned leaders. All involved spreading revolutionary ideas. All involved men who had worked near the sea or some other trade related craft. All fell victim to both the unpredictable weather and Blacks who betrayed them. Perhaps those Blacks, who betrayed them, felt that their conditions were far better than those of the plantation Blacks. All were in some way inspired by the events in Haiti, both the slave rebellion and the Revolution.

Coming amidst these three rebellions and influenced by the same events and conditions was a fiery pamphlet, *David Walkers Appeal (...) to the Colored Citizens of the World*<sup>54</sup>. Walker, (1785-?) was a free Black, born to a Black mother and a white father and had immigrated to Massachusetts from North Carolina. He was a contemporary of Frederick Douglass and Martin Delaney. The *Appeal* must be, according to noted scholar and close associate of the martyred Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Vincent Harding, considered the first Black Nationalist statement. Walker's appeal addressed 10 major themes and demands which have been documented by Vincent Harding<sup>55</sup>. Among them were that Blacks must end complicity with slave-owners and resist oppression, violently if need be. He called for solidarity with and unity among all Africans, 'free' and captive, throughout the African Diaspora. He demanded that Blacks resist the African Colonization Society's bid to rid America of its free people among them. He saw the education of Blacks as a weapon for freedom and equality. He called for action by whites to help acquire peace and justice and to end racism. Near the end of the *Appeal*, he told his readership

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<sup>54</sup> David WALKER *Appeal To the colour citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America*, ed. Robert Sean Wilentz, New York, Hill and Wang, 1995, see also Peter HINKS, *To Awaken My Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Resistance*, University Park (PA), Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

<sup>55</sup> Vincent HARDING, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, New York, Harcourt, Brace Javonovich, Publishers, 1981, chapter 4.

that he and others who fought against slavery and oppression would be persecuted and killed.

Walker, a used clothes salesman, personally raised funds to distribute the tract. Southern whites so feared its distribution that states like Georgia placed a \$10,000 bounty on his head if brought in alive and \$3,000 if dead. Those caught distributing the pamphlets were threatened with death. Southern governors demanded that the Massachusetts authorities arrest Walker and seize all copies of the publications, who alerted their counterparts that they were helpless to do so. White Northern abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and the Quaker Benjamin Lundy also argued against Blacks taking all radical measures including violence to free themselves. In the April, 1830 edition of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Lundy wrote «a more bold, daring, inflammatory publication, perhaps, never was issued from the press of any country»<sup>56</sup>.

Using the solidarity of seamen, Black and white, who came to his shop seeking cheap clothing and news, he sealed copies of the pamphlet in their wide bottomed pants, and found other methods to smuggle the work to southern Blacks. Walker, as he had predicted, did not live long after, dying mysteriously. The *Appeal* alerted whites of the intelligence of Blacks and warned them that slavery would be challenged in the North and in the South, violently if need be. This is where the real fear lied.

New York in 1741 and later Boston in 1828, gave the southern whites another fear. That was the cooperation of whites, among them seamen, most of who had traveled throughout the Atlantic world. These seamen had been themselves oppressed yet by working with Black sailors, and socializing they knew that at the base of their oppression was the emerging commodity production system and at its roots was the system of slavery. More importantly it warned the nation and the world that Blacks would act, and that many whites would join them to end the institution of slavery.

In colonial North America, Samuel Hopkins, a Congregationist pastor, wrote *Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (1776) a fiery attack on the Second Continental Congress supporting freedom for the enslaved Africans. However, it was in his lesser known work *To the Public* (1773) issued with Ezra Stiles that they first called for a moderate colonization plan to send freed slaves out of the mainland colonies. Their goal was to «send to light (...) to these nations in

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<sup>56</sup> Benjamin LUNDY, "Walker's Boston Pamphlet", in *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (April 1830), p. 15.

Africa, who have been injured so much by the slave trade (...) to promote the most important interest, the Kingdom of Christ»<sup>57</sup>. They promised to send two Blacks with distinct African names, Bristol Yamma, an enslaved African, and John Quamine [Quamino], a free man, to Guinea. Both men still spoke African languages. The intent was to train 40 Blacks, for this and other missions, but the plan was aborted because of revolutionary war hostilities. Thomas Jefferson first wrote about his support for colonization in 1776 and in 1781 he feared that «the slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his maser (...) when freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture»<sup>58</sup>. The difference between Hopkins and Stiles on one hand and Jefferson and later supporters of colonization is that the former proponents were genuinely bitter enemies of slavery and did what they thought was in the best interests of the Blacks according to their Christian beliefs. As Lamin Sanneh, historian of Blacks who went to West Africa, has shown, Hopkins «supported a scheme in which Christian blacks would be repatriated to Africa where they could live as free men and enjoy the fruit of their labor»<sup>59</sup>.

In 1815 Paul Cuffee a free Black and wealthy merchant from Massachusetts, lent his support spending \$4,000 of his own money to finance an expedition of 38 colonialists to Sierra Leone. He later boasted that thousands more had sent him pleas, begging for passage to Africa. It must be said that Cuffee had different reasons for supporting the 'Back to Africa'. He genuinely believed that Blacks would never find equality in racist America.

Black leaders in the Philadelphia were vehemently opposed to Cuffee's plan. Richard Allen, the founder of African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Absalom Jones, leader of the Protestant Episcopal Church, formed the Free African Society on April 12, 1787. Along with James Forten, another Black leader in Philadelphia, they led the opposition to colonization. All had been former students at *The Afri-*

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<sup>57</sup> Ezra STILES and Samuel HOPKINS, "To the Public (August 1773)" in *AM I NOT A FRIEND AND A BROTHER: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788*, ed. Roger Bruns, New York, Chelsea House, 1977, pp. 290-292. See also Samuel HOPKINS, *Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans*, New York, 1776).

<sup>58</sup> Thomas JEFFERSON, *Notes on the Slave Trade in Virginia*, New York, Harper, 1964, p. 138.

<sup>59</sup> Lamin SANNEH, *Abolitionist Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 46.



*can Free School* headed by Anthony Benezet. Some Quakers had also argued against colonization and in *Short Account of African* (1762) Benezet rhetorically asked: «What shall be done with those Negroes already imported and born in our families? Must they be sent to *Africa*? That would be to expose them to a strange land, to greater Difficulties than many of them labor under at present»<sup>60</sup>. In December of 1816, the Virginia Assembly adopted a resolution authoring the Governor to request from the President a place outside the United States to send free Blacks. Shortly after, on December 21, 1816 an 'unholy alliance' of emancipationist and slaveholders who wanted to rid the hemisphere of free blacks founded the American Colonization Society. Its full name was the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States. The Society was led by Robert Finley, a white minister from Princeton, New Jersey, who believed that resettlement to Africa would bring about an end to slavery. Supporters of the ACS included former American presidents James Monroe and James Madison and Supreme Court Justice John Marshall. However, the most ardent supporter was Henry Clay, the Kentucky Senator and slaveholder. The humanitarian Finley wrote that the Society's mission had three basic goals: «we would be cleared of them; we would send to Africa a population partially civilized and Christianized (...) [and] blacks would be put in a better condition»<sup>61</sup>. Finley left his home in New Jersey and traveled to Washington to meet with Clay, who was to give the keynote address at the founding meeting of the ACS. However, on his way he met with James Forten and other Philadelphia Black leaders. To his dismay they opposed his plan.

In January 1817, Forten, Allen and Jones organized a convention in Philadelphia, attended by 3,000 Blacks, to express their opposition to colonization. Forten wrote Cuffee «I must mention to you that the whole continent seems to be agitated concerning Colonising the People of Colour»<sup>62</sup>. He further told Cuffee that just as the ACS was meeting a month before, «the People of Colour here was very much frightened at first»<sup>63</sup>. Later adding «they were afraid that all the free people would be Compelled to go, particularly in the southern

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<sup>60</sup> Anthony BENEZET, *A Short Account*, p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> Philip FONER, *History of Black Americans*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1975, p. 585-586. See also Lamin SANNEH, *Abolitionist Abroad*, p. 190. and *Abolitionist Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999,

<sup>62</sup> Julie WINCH, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life and Times of James Forten*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 190. All footnotes fn 69 and 70 are from p. 190

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

States»<sup>64</sup>. The Philadelphia Blacks knew that the chief aim of the ACS was to deport all Blacks who had won their freedom or could read and write. These Blacks, most former slaves, would most likely come to aid their enslaved brethren and the whites knew this.

In 1821 the ACS sent the first expedition of Blacks to Liberia. The land, about 1,000 miles square, was purchased in 1822 for six gallons of rum, a hogshead of tobacco and other assorted goods worth about \$300. Around 20,000 Blacks were relocated. Its capital Monrovia was named after former President Monroe. Later that year Benjamin Lundy, the white abolitionist, published *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, where he advocated colonization.

It was obvious from the start that there were broad divisions among those wanted colonization. Just as Lundy used his paper to support the efforts of Black leaders, John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish began publication in 1827 of *Freedom's Journal* to oppose the ACS. Black leaders like Cuffe, on the one hand, and Forten, Allen and Jones and later Russwurm and Cornish, desperately wanted Black freedom yet found different ways to fight for it.

### *Summary*

Lawrence Tise, a historian of the proslavery movements, has written that «not until the decade before the American Revolution did anything like an extended intercolonial and international debate on slavery get underway»<sup>65</sup>. He further observed that «impelled by the new and widely circulating writings of a small coterie of Quaker emancipationist led by Anthony Benezet of Philadelphia various colonial thinkers used proslavery ideas to counter the first major attack in the new world»<sup>66</sup>.

In England during the conflict between the colonies and Britain, the Somerset case arose. James Somerset, the slave of a Boston customs official, Charles Stewart, escaped from his master upon their arrival in London. Granville Sharp had been looking for a case to test English law over whether a person could be held a slave on English soil. He came to the aid of Somerset proclaiming that slavery «was

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> Lawrence E. TISE, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery America*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1987, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

so odious that nothing can be suffered to support it»<sup>67</sup>. He legally challenged Stewart and the captain of the ship, James Knowles, over Somerset's freedom. The issue however went beyond this. Could one human being be the property of another? Lord Chief Justice Mansfield soon issued his famous Somerset decision of 1772 which stated that a slave could not be forced to leave England for a life of slavery anywhere else. Mansfield ruled that «whenever the inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a decision, I cannot say this is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged»<sup>68</sup>.

The bigger issues of property rights were carefully avoided. He did not declare, as was thought by some antislavery activists, that all slaves brought into a non slaveholding territory be declared free. Mansfield, no doubt, knew of the Wallace's *Principles of the Laws of Scotland*, written 12 years earlier. Wallace had asserted that «as soon as therefore he comes into a country in which the judges are not forgetful of their own humanity, it is their duty to remember that he is a man and to declare him to be free»<sup>69</sup>. Nonetheless, slaves in North America gave the Somerset decision their own positive interpretation by attempting to file countless «freedom suits» in the Northern courts. Most of the times they were denied the right to file their petitions.

Enslaved Africans had many times before had their hopes dashed. Thomas Jefferson in a first draft of the Declaration of Independence had called for the freedom of slaves, only to withdraw his plan in the face of southern opposition. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* he also expressed misgivings about slavery and his belief that Blacks were inferior. Even Granville Sharp had asserted that «I am far from having any particular esteem for the Negro; but as I think myself obliged also to consider them as men, I am certainly obliged to use my best endeavors to prevent their being treated as beasts by our unchristian countrymen»<sup>70</sup>. The 1770s and 1780s saw the development of anti-

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Maurice JACKSON, "The Rise of Abolition", in Toyin FALOLA and Kevin ROBERTS (Eds), *The Atlantic World, 1450-2000*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 234.

<sup>68</sup> Carl STEPHENSON, *English Constitutional History*, New York, Harper and Row, 1937, T.B. HOWELL ed., *A Complete Collection of State Trials to 1783*, 2nd ed., London, 1816-1826. *State Trials, Somerset Case #XX*, p. 82, Somerset v. Stewart in W. COBBETT, T. B. HOWELL et al. (eds), *State Trials*, 34 vols, London, 1828., vol 20, pp. 1-82.

<sup>69</sup> George WALLACE, *A System of the Laws of Scotland*, Edinburgh, W. Millar, 1760, pp. 95-96.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Maurice JACKSON, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, p. 76.

slavery societies throughout America and Britain. Manumission and abolition societies were formed in Pennsylvania where Benjamin Franklin later became their leader (1784), Rhode Island (1785) and New Jersey (1793). By 1827, there were 130 Abolition Societies and by 1838 the American Antislavery Society claimed over 1,350 members. The British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in 1787 with Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce and others, Quaker and non Quaker playing leading roles. In 1792 they lead a massive campaign in which antislavery activists collected more than 400,000 signatures and presented them to the House of Commons. That same year, the Parliamentary leader William Wilberforce, citing passages from Benezet and Clarkson proclaimed before the Commons that «since the trade had been used, all punishments are changed into slavery (...) Never before was another system so big with wickedness»<sup>71</sup>. Prime Minister William Pitt, the Younger closed the proceeding, as Wilberforce offered a motion, «that it is the opinion of this committee, that the trade carried on by British Subjects, for the purpose of obtaining Slaves on the coast of Africa, ought to be abolished»<sup>72</sup>. Although the motion did not pass the whole House, it was the first of its kind in the world. This action in 1792 led to the eventual abolition of the slave trade in 1807-1808. In 1833, 5,000 petitions were handed to Parliament containing 1.5 million signatures. This campaign was led by the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery, which was formed in 1823 with Wilberforce, Clarkson and others at its head. Their efforts and petitions led to the passage of the British Emancipation Act which provided that as of August 1, 1834 slavery would cease to exist in the British colonies.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibi*, p. 166.

<sup>72</sup> *The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1792 in the House of Commons, Wilberforce and Pitt Present, *Parliamentary Debates*, London, British Library, p. 40.

<sup>73</sup> At its height, there were never more than 14,000 Blacks, referred to as 'body servants' in Britain. For Britain the slave trade was not about meeting its own labor needs. It was about meeting its crass needs for profits and new world goods, which kept it at the center of the slave trade. Yet British humanitarians such as Sharp and Clarkson knew that the slave trade corrupted British society. In 1787 British reformers and abolitionists founded Sierra Leone and began the process of repatriating former slaves in London to Africa and sent 377 settlers. Its first town was named Granville Town, after Granville Sharp, who had supported the effort. Later, in 1792, 1,200 Blacks who had immigrated to Nova Scotia were resettled to Sierra Leone. Whereas most of the early antislavery leaders such as Benezet and Wollman opposed colonization, Sharp supported the concept. His *Short Sketch of Temporary Regulation* was seen as setting the founding ideas for the colony.

In France in 1770 the Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal published *Histoire des deux Indes*<sup>74</sup>. Taking evidence from Montesquieu, he believed that there «was nothing inherently inferior about Blacks and it was slavery that made them seem so»<sup>75</sup>. Raynal also predicted a 'Black Spartacus' would arise in the colonies world leading his people in the fight for freedom. Some year later, in 1788, the French formed the Société des Amis des Noir. The leaders were Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, Abbé Henri Grégoire, Antoine de Condorcet, Marquis de Lafayette, Count Honoré-Gabriel de Mirabeau, and Abbé Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès. Lafayette had fought with the patriots at Yorktown, having under his command future leaders of the Haitian revolution like Henri Christophe. Condorcet had written *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des negres*, in 1781<sup>76</sup>. He attacked the slave trade and slavery on humanitarian grounds and like Adam Smith he asserted that free labor was more productive and beneficial to the whites. The Société advocated the immediate end of the slave trade and an end to slavery in all French possessions. At the March 13, 1788 meeting of the Société, Brissot in urging international unity of action against slavery gave a presentation about the work of Anthony Benezet who the society 'venerated'. Several of his works had been translated in France. Having read Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1781) he said it is the «foreign corruption introduced in their country [Africa] by the avarice and cupidity of Europeans» with their «thirst for gold»<sup>77</sup>. He also believed that Europeans had the duty to end that to its practice to «exploit the treasures that it holds»<sup>78</sup>. In 1791 Abbé Grégoire issued his famous words to the Haitians «you were men; you are now citizens. Reinstated to the fullness of your rights, you will in future participate of the sovereignty of the people»<sup>79</sup>. The meaning of his proclamation, as were those of the

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<sup>74</sup> Guillaume-Thomas RAYNAL, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Amsterdam, s. n.: 1770, with augmented editions in 1774 and 1780.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Maurice JACKSON, "Friends of the Negro! Fly with me, The path is open to the sea: Remembering the Haitian Revolution in the History, Music, and Culture of the African American People", in *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 6, 1 (Spring 2008), p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat marquis de CONDORCET, *Réflexions sur l'esclavage des nègres*, Neufchâtel, Société typographique, 1781.

<sup>77</sup> Marcel DORIGNY and Bernard GAINOT, *La Société des Amis des Noirs*, Paris, UNESCO, 1998, p.91.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> Abbé GRÉGOIRE, *Letter of the Abbé Grégoire to the Citizens in the French West Indies Concerning the Decree of 15 May, 1791*.

Haitian leaders, was heard by Blacks throughout the Atlantic world. In 1794 the National Convention abolished slavery throughout the French empire and emancipated its slaves in the colonies totaling over 650,000 although as in most places the illegal trade continued until the Société Française pour l'abolition de l'esclavage helped to secure its end in 1831. Slavery officially ended in the French colonies in 1848.

In the United States the debates over means and methods to end slavery lasted from the 1820s until the end of the Civil War. Was it to be gradual or immediate? Some white abolitionists even debated whether or not to allow Blacks to speak up for their own freedom or even to fight in the Union Army. At the beginning of the Civil War Abraham Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 men to join the Union Army. Many Blacks responded only to be denied the 'right to fight' for their own freedom. They then began a campaign 'fight to fight'. By the time he issued the Emancipation Proclamation Lincoln realized that to win the war Black troops would have to be mustered. In Massachusetts a call was issued «To Colored Men-Wanted. Good men for the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers of African descent»<sup>80</sup>. Another group, the Second South Carolina, was also formed. To his credit Lincoln recruited Black leaders like Frederick Douglass and Martin Delaney to help recruit Black soldiers. He once wrote to Andrew Johnson «the bare sight of fifty thousand armed and drilled Black men in uniform on the banks of the Mississippi would end the rebellion at once. And who doubts we can present that sight, if we but take hold in earnest».<sup>81</sup> By war's end over 180,000 Blacks had served in the Union Army. They had fought in over 450 battles with about 40 being major ones.

Many white abolitionists found it difficult to accept Black women abolitionists like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth and Black men like Frederick Douglas. The great abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of the leading antislavery paper *the Liberator*, called for immediate end to slavery and racial discrimination in 1831. Yet he roundly criticized Douglass when the ex slave spoke at Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848, on behalf of the rights of women, including their right to vote. Garrison had opposed women's rights and some of Douglass' more radical abolitionist ideas. Others could not accept

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<sup>80</sup> Posters appeared and an advertisement was placed in the *Boston Journal* on February 16, 1863. It read: «To Colored Men. Wanted. Good men for the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers of African descent».

<sup>81</sup> Roy P. BASLER, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols., New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1955, IV, p. 517-518.

his demand that Blacks be enlisted in the Union army or his call for "Men of Color, To Arms"<sup>82</sup>. Still others found it difficult to accept Douglass' work to internationalize the struggle and link it with oppression wherever he witnessed it. Thus words attributed to Douglass a blow for freedom anywhere is a blow for freedom everywhere and «he who desires freedom must strike the first blow». Once in England, Douglass encountered a poor Irishman, who used drink for food, and had fallen in a ditch. Half of the man's face had been bitten off by rats that were as hungry as he was. When Douglass linked the British oppression of Irish with the British and American complicity in slavery, he was criticized by white abolitionists, just as he was when he spoke up for women's rights. On July 4, 1852 he proclaimed «I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! The Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn»<sup>83</sup>.

Although he refused to go with John Brown to Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) in 1859 believing that he [Douglass] was more valuable alive than dead, he understood his friend Brown's belief, that he [Brown] would be worth more to the cause dead than alive. Brown along with several of his sons and other men died as they attempted to take the military arsenal on October 16, 1859. But the Blacks knew, as Douglass said in a memorial service to his friend, that it was old Osawatomie «who began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic» Douglass also said that «I could live for the slave, but he could die for him»<sup>84</sup>. And just as Blacks martyred Brown, Douglass refused the demands of white abolitionists that he denounce Brown. Instead Douglass later said of his friend, «his zeal for the cause was far greater than mine – it was the burning sun to my taper light»<sup>85</sup>. Douglass had remembered the words of President Abraham Lincoln «there must be a position of superior and inferior and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race»<sup>86</sup>. Douglass

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<sup>82</sup> Frederick DOUGLASS, *Men of Color, To Arms* (March 21, 1863), in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, New York, International Publishers, 1950, III, p. 317-319.

<sup>83</sup> Frederick DOUGLASS, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro (speech at Rochester)", New York, July 5, 1852, in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, New York, International Publishers, 1950, II, p. 189,

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Benjamin QUARLES, *Allies for Freedom & Blacks on John Brown*, New York, DeCapo Press, 1974, p. 55.

<sup>85</sup> Merrill D. PETERSON, *The Legend Revisited John Brown*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 2002, p. 49.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Michael P. JOHNSON, "Abraham Lincoln: Address on Colonization to a Delegation of Black Americans, August 14, 1862", in *Lincoln, Slavery and the Civil*

remembered Lincoln's 'Address on Colonization' where on April 14, 1862 when he told them «it is better for us both, therefore, to be separated» as he encouraged free Blacks to immigrate to Central America. Lincoln added «the political affairs in Central America are not quite as satisfactory as I wish» but as «to your colored race they have no objections»<sup>87</sup>. He then told them that «Central America» is «nearer than Liberia (...) and within seven days run by steamers» and «because of the similarity of the climate with your native land – thus being suited to your physical presence»<sup>88</sup>. Douglass and his allies Black and white, in America and abroad, compared Lincoln's words with the deeds of 'old Osawatomie', John Brown.

With the 1860s came the American Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Slavery had ended in the United States and gradual manumission laws were enacted by degrees in many countries in Latin and South America. But slavery still remained on North American soil when Dr. Carlos Manuel des Céspedes freed his slaves at La Demajagua in Oriente Province, Cuba, on October 10, 1868. With 37 planters at his side, he proclaimed Cuban independence from his own plantation. The *Grito de Yara* started the revolutionary war for independence just as the insurrectionist proclaimed freedom for all slaves. The war lasted 10 years. In 1870 the Spanish introduced the Moret Law freeing newborn offsprings of slaves, all those 60 years old and those who had fought for Spain in the Ten Years War with Cuba, but widespread slavery still existed. Although Spain abolished slavery in Puerto Rico in 1783 it was not until 1886 that the Spanish government abolished slavery in all of its colonial possessions including Cuba. Brazil soon followed with its so called 'Golden Law' and freed its last 70,000 slaves in 1888. Frederick Douglass had watched events in Cuba, just as he had in Britain and noted the actions of de Céspedes and his comrades. He wrote «the first gleam of the sword of freedom and independence in Cuba secured my sympathy with the revolutionary cause»<sup>89</sup>.

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*War: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed., Boston, Bedford, 2001, p. 201-202. Lincoln said «the political affairs in Central America are not quite as satisfactory condition as I wish but as to your colored race they have no objections». Lincoln also told then that «Central America is nearer to than Liberia... and within seven days run by steamers» and «because of the similarity of the climate with your native land – thus being suited to your physical presence».

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>89</sup> Frederick DOUGLASS to S.R. Scottern, Esq. March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1873, in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip Foner, New York, International Publishers, 1975, IV, p. 303.



Carlo Botta wrote that the American revolutionaries detected «for themselves, what they found convenient to exercise upon others»<sup>90</sup>. In the end that desire for freedom that he wrote about ignited the revolutionary cause started by the Americans and rising amongst the French and the Haitians. For antislavery revolutionaries' this noble goal included the ending of slavery in the Americas and that revolutionary cause was truly an Atlantic one.

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<sup>90</sup> Carlo BOTTA, *History of the War of Independence of the United States of America*, New Haven, Nathan Whiting, 1837, I, p. 19.

