



Engraving of Anderson from the title page of his 1857 Narrative.

“THE HALF WILL NEVER BE TOLD...”

*Former slave William J. Anderson
Recounts the Contributions of Black Soldiers
in the Revolutionary War.*

It was owing to both the Christian religion and to the military that the emancipation of the Black slaves in America was ultimately possible. Without these time honored and most essential institutions, freeing the African slaves in this country, at best, would have been long deferred, if not voided entirely.

Among the reasons for this being the case is that religion and the military are the basis of virtually all civil governments, and when it comes to a society based on law, no person holds a higher rank therein than a priest or a soldier. Pick whatever civil society or culture, whether ancient or modern, you like, and without exception the founders of nations are men in uniform and or men of the cloth; though granted the nature of that “cloth” may widely differ, and even the most secular society must have its *high priests* of one sort or another. In turn, and where interests inevitably jar or violently conflict, it is religion and the military that are the basis of practical trust and the authority that empowers and makes possible working and effective laws.

Moreover, in a racially and culturally diverse country like the United States, Christianity, teaching as it did that all men were equal before God, was easily among the most puissant and persuasive forces driving and rendering successful the abolitionist movement. This is borne out time and time again both in the actual history and in the literature of that movement in the periods leading up to the Civil War. It was God, as creator, declaring men equal that made them so, not the mere fiat of any man or men or the common law. The slave was prisoner or victim appealing to a higher authority that would release him from bondage, and yet what mere man, as authority, could succor him in a society where hundreds of thousands and then millions were in need redress for their grievances? Meantime, Christianity as such made it possible for a man to become a priest or minister, and assuming him able and qualified, could catapult a slave or former slave from the lowest level of society to one of its highest and most respected callings.

A further reason why religion and the military were absolutely necessary ingredients in freeing the slaves in that they both furnished a means by which a person of a different race or color could prove their worth, equality, or superiority with others who, invoking stereotypes and conventional prejudice, might claim to be their betters. True, wealth and education are also and can be measures of a citizen. Yet outside of isolated and individual cases, these latter are seldom possible to be realized unless the man (understanding that in those earlier times manhood was the starting point of suffrage) can first establish his rights in society with the approval of religion and, as well, by way of the testing ground of military discipline and valor. The number of people at large who sufficiently esteem the value of higher education are relatively few, and where the measure of status is mere money, equitable law itself and before long will

cease to exist; for the simple reason that under such a system rights and immunity from persecution and enslavement can simply be purchased away; regardless of any moral merit or integrity of character the holder of the most money possesses.

If religion made viable and gave the abolitionist cause practical credibility, second to it was the opportunity of fighting in the armed forces of the United States on behalf of the cause of *liberty*. While it was often remarked then and since how incongruous it was for supposedly freedom loving Americans to own slaves, yet the truth was it was due to the American Revolutionary War officers that Blacks were given the chance to prove their worth on a widespread basis in a society that would otherwise not allow it. Early America historian Thomas Fleming, in his *A Disease in the Public Mind: A New Understanding of Why We Fought the Civil War* (2013), points out that one out of seven soldiers in the Continental Army were men of color, and several very prominent and higher ranking officers in the Continental army were on the list of those who espoused the idea recruiting blacks; at a time and in a society where such a notion could hardly be considered extensively popular. These included no less than Washington (though granted early in the war and for diplomatic reasons he tended to be hesitant), Greene, Lafayette, James Varnum, Alexander Hamilton, John Laurens and Thaddeus Kosciuszko. Whether consciously or no, an unstated bargain was made by such (for their time) audacious officers and the Blacks. Serve our cause and we will help form the grounds for your ultimate emancipation. For when society sees that you can and will serve your country honorably and courageously then they will necessarily be compelled to think twice about keeping you down always as a slave. Many Blacks and white sympathizers well understood this implication and when into the 19th century the abolitionist movement gained momentum and came to a head, they were quick to avail themselves of this incontrovertible argument.

One of these was William J. Anderson, a former slave originally from Virginia and later Mississippi, who in 1857 published, in Chicago, his *Life and Narrative of William J. Anderson, Twenty-four Years a Slave; Sold Eight Times! In Jail Sixty Times!! Whipped Three Hundred Times!!! or The Dark Deeds of American Slavery Revealed. Containing Scriptural Views of the Origin of the Black and of the White Man. Also, a Simple and Easy Plan to Abolish Slavery in the United States. Together with an Account of the Services of Colored Men in the Revolutionary War--Day and Date, and Interesting Facts.*¹ Although his *Narrative* is of special worth in presenting the autobiography of a one-time slave in the United States, chronicling the extreme sufferings and brutal hardships he and fellows, male and female, like him endured, of particular interest to us is his piecing together one of the earliest histories of the record of the Black soldier in the Revolutionary War. Not least compelling and engaging is that we have a Black man voicing this record, rather than the more usual white spokesman doing so on behalf of an oppressed race. This of itself gives Anderson's presentation a lasting charm, and that furnishes him an occasion to express both his endearment of his own forefathers and warm pride in their having in no small part helped to found this nation.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### SERVICES OF COLORED MEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

A great many of the whites say that colored people never done anything in the wars of this country; therefore they wish us away. Some say let them go to Liberia, while others say let them go to the Rocky Mountains. This is our native country; here we were born; here we have lived, and are acclimated; and now I will show that we performed no unimportant part in the Revolutionary struggle.

#### MASSACHUSETTS.

On the fifth of March, 1851, a petition was presented to the Massachusetts Legislature, asking an appropriation of \$1,500 for erecting a monument to the memory of Crispus Attucks, the first martyr in the Boston Massacre of March 5th, 1770. The matter was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, who granted a hearing of the petitioners, in whose behalf appeared Wendell Phillips, Esq., and Wm. C. Nell, but

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://archive.org/details/lifeandnarrativ00andegoog> for the full text in .pdf.

finally submitted an adverse report on the ground that a boy, Christopher Snyder, was previously killed. Admitting this fact, (which was the result of a very different scene from that in which Attucks fell,) does not offset the claims of Attacks, and those who made the 5th of March famous in our annals—the day which history selects as the dawn of the American Revolution.

#### RHODE ISLAND.

The Hon. Tristram Burgess, of Rhode Island, in a speech in Congress, first month, 1828, said: “At the commencement of the Revolutionary War, Rhode Island had a number of slaves. A regiment of them were enlisted into the Continental service, and no braver men met the enemy in battle; but not one of them was permitted to be a soldier until he had first been made a free man.”

“In Rhode Island,” says Governor Eustis, in his able speech against Slavery in Missouri, 12th of twelfth month, 1820, “the blacks formed an entire regiment, and they discharged their duty with zeal and fidelity. The gallant defence of Red Bank, in which the black regiment bore a part, is among the proofs of their valor.” In this contest, it will be recollected, four hundred men met and repulsed, after a terrible and sanguinary struggle, fifteen hundred Hessian troops, headed by Count Donop. The glory of the defence of Red Bank, which has been pronounced one of the most heroic actions of the War, belongs in reality to black men; yet who now hears them spoken of in connection with it? Among the traits which distinguished the black regiment, was devotion to their officers. In the attack made upon the American lines, near Croton river, on the 13th of fifth month, 1781, Colonel Greene, the commander of the regiment, was cut down and mortally wounded; but the sabres of the enemy only reached him through the bodies of his faithful guard of blacks, who hovered over him to protect him; *every one of whom was killed.*

#### CONNECTICUT.

Hon. Calvin Goddard, of Connecticut, states that in the little circle of his residence, he was instrumental in securing, under the act of 1818, the pensions of nineteen colored soldiers. “I cannot,” he says, “refrain from mentioning one aged black man, Primus Babcock, who proudly presented to me an honorable discharge from service during the war, dated at the close of it, wholly in the handwriting of George Washington. Nor can I forget the expression of his feelings when informed, after his discharge had been sent to the War Department, that it could not be returned. At his request it was written for, as he seemed inclined to spurn the pension and reclaim the discharge.”

During the Revolutionary War, and after the sufferings of a protracted contest had rendered it difficult to procure recruits for the army, the Colony of Connecticut adopted the expedient of forming a corps of colored soldiers. A battalion of blacks was soon enlisted, and throughout the war conducted themselves with fidelity and efficiency. The late General Humphreys, then a captain, commanded a company of this corps. It is said that some objections were made, on the part of officers, to accepting the command of the colored troops. In this exigency, Captain Humphreys, who was attached to the family of General Washington, volunteered his services.

The following extract, furnished by Charles Lenox Remond, from the pay rolls of the second company, fourth regiment of the Connecticut line of the revolutionary army, may rescue many gallant names from oblivion:

*Captain, David Humphreys.*

*Privates.*

Jack Arabus,  
John Cleveland,  
Phineas Strong,  
Ned Fields,  
Isaac Higgins,  
Lewis Martin,  
Caesar Chapman,

Jo Otis,  
James Dinah,  
Peter Mix,  
Philo Freeman,  
Hector Williams,  
Juba Freeman,  
Cato Robinson,

Prince Johnson,  
Alexander Judd,  
Pomp Liberty,  
Cuff Liberty,  
Pomp Cyrus,  
Harry Williams,  
Sharp Rogers,

Brister Baker,  
Caesar Bagdon,  
Gameliel Terry,  
Lent Munson,  
Heman Rogers,  
Job Caesar,  
John Rogers,  
John Ball,  
John McLean,  
Jesse Vose,  
Daniel Bradley,  
Sharp Camp,

Prince George,  
Prince Crosbee,  
Shubael Johnson,  
Tim Caesar,  
Jack Little,  
Bill Sowers,  
Dick Violet,  
Ned Freedom,  
Ezekiel Tupham,  
Tom Freeman,  
Congo Zado,  
Peter Gibbs,

Solomon Sowtice,  
Peter Freeman,  
Cato Wilbrow,  
Cuff Freeman,  
Juba Dyer,  
Andrew Jack,  
Peter Morando,  
Peter Lion,  
Sampson Cuff,  
Dick Freedom,  
Pomp McCuff.

The names of the two brave men of color who fell, with [William] Ledyard, at the storming of Fort Griswold, were Sambo Latham and Jordan Freeman.

Ebenezer Hills died at Vienna, N. Y., August, 1849, aged 110. He was born a slave in Stonington, Conn., and became free when twenty-eight years of age. He served through the Revolutionary War, and was at the battles of Saratoga and Stillwater, and was present at the surrender of Burgoyne.

The colored inhabitants of Connecticut assembled in Convention in 1849, to devise means for their elective franchise, which is yet denied to seven thousand of their number. A gentleman present reports the following extract:—"A young man, Mr. West, of Bridgeport, spoke with a great deal of energy, and with a clear and pleasant tone of voice, which many a lawyer, statesman or clergyman might covet, nobly vindicating the rights of the brethren. He said that the bones of the colored man had bleached on every battle-field where American valor had contended for national independence. Side by side with the white man, the black man stood and struggled to the last for the inheritance which the white men now enjoy but deny to us. His father was a soldier-slave, and his master said to him, when the liberty of the country was achieved, 'Stephen, we will do something for you.' But what have they ever done for Stephen, or for Stephen's posterity?"

#### NEW HAMPSHIRE.

The Rev. Dr. Harris, of Portsmouth, N. H., a revolutionary veteran, stated in a speech at Francestown, N. H., some years ago, that on one occasion the regiment to which he was attached was commanded to defend an important position which the enemy thrice assailed, and from which they were as often repulsed. "There was," said the venerable speaker, "a regiment of blacks in the same situation—a regiment of negroes fighting for our liberty and independence, not a white man among them but the officers—in the same dangerous and responsible position. Had they been unfaithful, or given away before the enemy, all would have been lost. Three times in succession were they attacked with most desperate fury by well-disciplined and veteran troops, and three times did they successfully repel the assault, and thus preserve an army. They fought thus through the war. They were brave and hardy troops."

#### VERMONT.

August 16th, 1777, the Green Mountain Boys, aided by troops from New Hampshire, and some few from Berkshire county, Massachusetts, under the command of Gen. Starks [sic, John Stark], captured the left wing of the British Army near Bennington. Not having rope enough to tie all the prisoners, Gen. Starks called for more. Mrs. Robinson, wife of Hon. Moses Robinson, told the General that she would take down the last bed-stead in the house and present him with the rope, on condition that he would permit her negro man to harness up an old mare, and hitch the rope to the whiffletree, mount the mare, and conduct the prisoners out of town. The General accepted the proposition, and thus was the left wing of the British army marched out of town.

Gen. Schuyler writes from Saratoga, July 23, 1777, to the President of Massachusetts Bay, "That of the few Continental troops we have had to the Northward, one-third part is composed of men too far

advanced in years for field service, of boys, or rather children, and, mortifying barely to mention, of negroes.”

The General also addressed a similar letter to John Hancock, and again to the Provincial Congress, that the foregoing were facts which were altogether uncontrovertible.

#### NEW YORK.

I am indebted to Rev. Theodore Parker, of Boston, for the following Historical Sketch of New York Soldierly:

“Not long ago, while the excavations for the vaults of the great retail dry goods store of New York were going on in 1851, a gentleman from Boston noticed a large quantity of human bones thrown up by the workmen. Everybody knows the African countenance: the skulls also bore unmistakable marks of the race they belonged to. They were shoveled up with the earth in which they had rested, carted off and emptied into the sea to fill up a chasm and make the foundation of a warehouse.

“On inquiry, the Bostonian learned that these were the bones of colored American soldiers who fell in the disastrous battles of Long Island, in 1776, and of such as died of the wounds then received. At that day, as at this, spite of the declaration that ‘all men are created equal,’ the prejudice against the colored man was intensely strong. The black and white had fought against the same enemy, under the same banner, contending for the same ‘inalienable right’ to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The same shot, with promiscuous slaughter, had mowed down Africans and Americans. But in the grave they must be divided. On the battle field the blacks and whites had mixed their bravery and their blood, but their ashes must not mingle in the bosom of their common mother. The white Saxon, exclusive and haughty even in his burial, must have his place of rest proudly apart from the grave of the African he had once enslaved.”

#### PENNSYLVANIA.

The late James Forten, of Philadelphia, well known as a colored man of wealth, intelligence and philanthropy, relates that he remembered well when Lord Cornwallis was overrunning the South, when thick gloom clouded the prospect. Then Washington hastily gathered what forces he was able, and hurried to oppose him. And I remember,” said he, “for I saw them, when the regiments from Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts marched through Philadelphia, that one or two companies of colored men were attached to each. The vessels of war of that period were all, to a greater or less extent, manned with colored men. On board the ‘Royal Louis’ of twenty-six guns, commanded by Captain Stephen Decatur, senior [i.e., father of the captain of Tripoli and 1812 fame], there were twenty colored seamen. I had myself enlisted in this vessel, and on the second cruise was taken prisoner, and shortly after was confined on board the old Jersey Prison Ship, where I remained a prisoner for seven months. The Alliance, of thirty-six guns, commanded by Commodore Barry; the Trumbull, of thirty-two guns, commanded by Captain [James] Nicholson; and the ships South Carolina, Confederacy, and Randolph, each were manned in part by colored men.”

#### SOUTH CAROLINA.

Even in the Slaveholding States did colored people magnanimously “brave the battle field,” developing a heroism indeed as though their own liberty was to be a recompense. But we found no proof that the boasted chivalry of the “Palmetto State extended the boon demanded by simple justice.

The celebrated Charles Pinckney, of South Carolina, in his speech on the Missouri question, and in defiance of the Slave representation of the South, made the following admission:

“They (the colored people) were, in numerous instances, the pioneers, and, in all, the laborers of our armies. To their hands were owing the greatest part of the fortifications raised for the protection of the country. Fort Moultrie gave, at an early period of the inexperience and untried, valor of our citizens, immortality to the American arms.”

## VIRGINIA.

The Last or Braddock's Defeat.—The Lancaster (O.) .Gazette, February, 1849, announces the death, at that place, of Samuel Jenkins, a colored man, aged 115 years. He was a slave of Captain Breadwater, in Fairfax county, Virginia, in 1771, and participated in the memorable campaign of Gen. Braddock.

Testimony of Hon. Robert C. Winthrop.—From his speech in Congress, on the Imprisonment of Colored Seamen, September, 1850:

“I have an impression, however, that not indeed in these piping times of peace, but in the time of war, when quite a boy, I have seen black soldiers enlisted, who did faithful and excellent service. But however it may have been in the Northern States, I can tell the Senator what happened in the Southern States at this period. I believe that I shall be borne out in saying that no regiments which were organized under the direction of General Jackson himself, after a most glorious appeal to the patriotism and honor of the people of color of that region, and which, after they came out of the war, received the thanks of Gen. Jackson, in a proclamation which has been thought worthy of being inscribed on the pages of history.”

## LOUISIANA.

In 1814, when New Orleans was in danger, and the proud and criminal distinctions of caste were again demolished by one of those emergencies in which nature puts to silence for the moment the base partialities of art, the free colored people were called into the field in common with the whites, and the importance of their services was thus acknowledged by General Jackson:

“Head Quarters, Seventh Military District,  
Mobile, September 21, 1814.

*“To the Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana:*

“Through a mistaken policy, you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights, in which *our* country is engaged. This no longer shall exist.

“As Sons of Freedom, you are now called upon to defend our most inestimable blessings. As *Americans*, your country looks with confidence to her adopted children, for a valorous support, as a faithful return for the advantages enjoyed under her mild and equitable government. As fathers, husbands, and brothers, you are summoned to rally around the standard of the eagle, to defend all which is dear in existence.

“Your country, although calling for your assistance, does not wish you to engage in her cause without remunerating you for the services rendered. Your intelligent minds are not to be led away by false representations—your love of honor would cause you to despise the man who should attempt to deceive you. With the sincerity of a soldier, and in the language of truth, I address you.

“To every noble hearted free man of color, volunteering to serve during the present contest with Great Britain, and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty in money and lands now received by the white soldiers of the United States, namely: one hundred and twenty dollars in money and one hundred and sixty acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay, daily rations and clothes furnished to any American soldier.

“On enrolling yourselves in companies the Major General commanding will select officers, for your government, from your white fellow citizens. Your non-commissioned officers will be appointed from among yourselves.

“Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.

“To assure you of the sincerity of my intentions, and my anxiety to engage your invaluable services to our country, I have communicated my wishes to the Governor of Louisiana, who is fully informed as to the manner of enrollments, and will give you every information on the subject of this address.

“Andrew Jackson,  
Major General Commanding.”

Joseph Davis, A Colored Soldier.—There lives an old man in Madison, Ind., who was in the battle of New Orleans. He says a colored man told Jackson how to place the cotton bales for protection, and says there were 3,000 colored soldiers in the battle, and they fought like heroes. When the armies met, it was like heaven and earth had come together. I jumped over the fort, and took up a rifle and a gold watch, and jumped back again, while the balls were flying like hailstones. He was divested of all his apparel, nearly, but no blood was drawn by this operation, and he still lives to tell the tale that the colored men have labored for this country.

Theodore Parker says the first cannon the United States ever had, a colored man stole from the British lines.

After the wars of '76, John Randolph presented a flag with his inscription on it to a company of colored men called the “Bucks of America.”

Capt. Ford, of Madison, Ind., says three of the best men he had in his company in Mexico were colored men, who were obedient and did good service.

The half will never be told of what the colored men have done, and how they have bled and died for this country; on nearly every battle field, on sea and land, and on the ice, has the black man spilt his blood freely. But, now the battle is over and the victory is won, what do we receive in return? Here is what we get: knocked down, shot down, branded, burned, run down by hounds, starved, and worked without compensation, sold from our wives and children for gold. O, when I dwell or speak on these subjects in my lectures, some think I am crazy or filled with wine; so they said of the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost. When I talk about what I have been through, it makes me tremble and quake like the jailor did before Peter.

If it was not for Slavery, what a great and good country we should have in the South. Oh! if the Christians all would act against Slavery, it could not stand; but in the South the preacher sells the preacher from his family and friends for gold; the sister beats the sister over the head with a stick or anything she gets her hands on; but I hope the time will come when all the Christian Church, North and South, will pray and act against Slavery, till liberty and freedom shall cover over our land, as the waters do the great deep, and the master and slave shall worship God together...

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*Wm. Thomas Sherman*  
1604 NW 70th St.  
Seattle, Washington 98117  
206-784-1132  
[wts@gunjones.com](mailto:wts@gunjones.com)  
<http://www.gunjones.com> and [http://www.scribd.com/wsherman\\_1](http://www.scribd.com/wsherman_1)

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