

Group XVI-Negro

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Black Harry
by
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The records are not quite clear with regard to the earliest arrival of Negroes in the State of New York.

It is definitely recorded that Negroes were brought to Brazil and the West Indian Islands as early as between the years 1501 and 1510. Haiti received its first cargo of slaves in 1502. The slaves were employed on the sugar plantations in these countries.

It is known that, during the month of September, 1619, twenty slaves were landed at Jamestown, Va., but it seems probable that a Negro woman arrived in Jamestown several months earlier.

Benjamin Brawley, the historian, claims that it is more likely that Negroes were introduced into the United States in 1526.

New Amsterdam, as our city was called, was settled as a Dutch colony in 1623, but it was not until its purchase by Governor Minuit, from the Indians, that it actually had its beginning as New York City.

Slavery began under Dutch rule in 1626 when eleven Negroes were brought to New Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company. At this period of the city's development, this number of Negroes represented only about five per cent of the non-aboriginal population of New Amsterdam.

In 1629, three Negro women were added to the population.

Certain records seem to indicate that there were some Negroes in New York as early as the time of the arrival of slaves in

Virginia.

There was not much increase in the Negro population until slavery received full legal status in 1665. After this time, the population began to increase with comparative rapidity, and in 1694, there were 2,170 slaves in New York City.

It was necessary to give you this background in order to allow you to appreciate more fully the brief story about one of the city's earliest Negro inhabitants.

It is evident from the records left us by historians that, Black Harry was among the first slaves who became inhabitants of New Amsterdam. From such authorities as Houlton and Watson, we are told that Black Harry was bought at New York by Richard Smith. He was taken to Smithtown, in Suffolk County, Long Island. Richard Smith was the first proprietor of Smithtown, and the property, including Black Harry was inherited by his grandson, Captain Smith, who was ~~XXXXX~~ ^{more than} sixty years of age in 1759. It is claimed that Black Harry remained with this family for not less than one hundred years. He could do a hard day's work when he was more than one hundred years old.

Black Harry died at Smithtown in December 1758 and was at least one hundred and twenty years of age when he died. It is said that he could recall the time when New York City had only three houses.

This extraordinary story of one of the earliest Negro inhabitants of New York compels a great deal of reflection when we consider the importance of ~~XXXX~~ New York City as one of the greatest cities in the world to-day. Its phenomenal growth can

be readily seen when we make a comparison of the population in 1626 with the enormous population at the present time.

In 1930, according to the figures given by the United States Census Bureau, the Negro population for the State of New York was 412,814, and of these, 327,706 were residents of New York City.

The condition of the Negro has changed considerably, but he still suffers as a result of exploitation, prejudice and unjust discrimination.

J.W. Moulton, in his History of State of New York, published in 1826, says:

"Slaves, thus early, constituted a portion of the population, and their introduction cannot be contemplated with spathy. It was one of those features in the infamy of the settlement, which became distiguishing-not because slaves had been excluded from all other North American Colonies, for Virginia had them, but because the circumstance shows how reckless was the spirit of gain, which, with its pervading genius and comprehensive energy tainted the life blood and controlled the destinies of New Netherland. The Dutch, it is true, were not the first who invaded the peace, or, for the sake of slaves, fomented the quarrels of Africa, nor the first who, while implanting the barbed arrow, whose wound was to fester for ages, transfused its poison into the moral atmosphere of the New World which forms the subject of these pages, that curse which has been justly execrated by the friends of humanity and all advocates for the rights of man throughout the world. Whatever difficulty there may be to remedy an evil, which, though

daily visible and tangible, is hardly susceptible of a radical cure, yet in its inception and progress, when the mischief might have been cramped with in safety and success, there was, in its toleration, or rather in the conduct of its authors and abettors, a plain dereliction of the immortal principles of natural justice; principles which, whether on the Coast of Labrador or Austral Asia—whether in Central Africa or Central Europe sway the bosoms of men, and illustrate by their sovereignty and their development under various circumstances an origin in abstract right, if not practical immutability. But the conduct of those who, while struggling to free themselves from the bigot and the tyrant, deliberately bound the chains which they had burst, around the defenceless and the unoffending, merits a tenfold execration. In such a case as this ^{the} simultaneous example of other slave-trading nations, afford no apology. The enormity becomes aggravated by its hypocrisy: and no anomaly appears more detestable than that of those, who, the moment they cease to be slaves, become tyrants."

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From History of State of New York by J.W. Moulton (Page 373)

"It seems, from allusions made in the Dutch record, that slaves were here in 1626. Probaly they were here earlier-for it is said that a Dutch ship brought slaves from Virginia in 1620, and they were, perhaps, in New Netherland, concomitant with its first settlement. This must have been the case, if the following extraordinary fact be true. An obituary appeared in the newspapers (A.D. 1739-40) of the death of a Negro at Smithtown, Long Island, reputed to have been 140 years old, who had declared that he well remembered when there were but three houses in New York. The reader will reflect upon the unexampled growth of a city which, while this note is penned (1826) contains some inhabitants in whose youthful days, one person at least recollected the time when there were three houses only."

From Annals of New York, by John T. Watson

(2) "An aged Negro man on Long Island, died at Smithtown, in Suffolk County, say, Negro Harry, in December, 1758, at least one hundred and twenty years of age when he died. He remembered New York, he said, when there were but three houses in it, (and now consider, that now in 1834, there are persons alive on Long Island who could have seen that man.) He could do a good day's work when past one hundred years. He was purchased at New York by Richard Smith, the first proprietor of Smithtown, and descended down to his grandson, Captain Richard Smith, of the same town, who is himself past sixty years of age in 1759. He had been a slave one hundred years in Smith's family, and supposed himself one hundred and forty years old."