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# The Role of the Negro in American History

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Negro History

THE ROLE OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN HISTORY

A Special Studies Paper

H-491

Prepared for

Dr. Wetherington

by

Carol Kimbrough

*10/28*

Fall Semester 1968

Ouachita University

## THE ROLE OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN HISTORY

For my special studies paper this semester, I have chosen as my subject a topic about which I was totally in the dark--The Role of the Negro in American History. The sad part was that I wasn't even aware that I didn't know anything about this topic. In fact, I didn't even know there was such a topic. Before my sudden awakening to the highly significant role that the Negro has played in molding our history, I thought that the one and only intelligent Negro was George Washington Carver; after all, he was the only one mentioned in any of my history books.

It is with much shame and much resentment toward "certain" people of the supposedly superior white race that I say that I was a senior in college before I found out such carefully hidden facts as that there was a Negro who accompanied Christopher Columbus to the New World or that there were two Negroes who crossed the Delaware with Washington, to mention only a few!

The only consolation I have is the fact that it was not entirely my fault. The question comes to mind of who is to blame for such a huge oversight? None of the textbooks used in our schools contain such information. Our textbooks have

omitted or distorted Negro contributions to history. School texts have pictured the Negro in our history as contented under slavery and bewildered by freedom. This is truly a prime example of distortion.

(It should be noted here that the statement in the previous paragraph concerning the information included in our textbooks is based on research done for this paper that uses the textbooks used in the Arkadelphia Public Schools as well as the reading I did on this subject from various sources.)

The teachers could have integrated such information as was needed to make the textbooks accurate. But instead of placing the blame on teachers, I will assume that they too, like I, were ignorant of the facts. Who is to blame is highly irrelevant. The task that is ours is to correct the situation since the history of the Negro in America is an integral part of American history.

Ours is supposedly the best educated people in the world and the best educated of all times. I hold that nothing could be further from the truth as long as important aspects of our history are omitted because of the skin color of the person who performed the significant or noteworthy act.

"...With liberty and justice for all." Need I point out the irony in this "revered" statement to which we pledge our allegiance and theoretically to which we are dedicated to uphold and live by.

It should be pointed out now that I am not criticizing such a high institution as our education system and the people

that have chosen to spend their lives educating our youth, without having first worked out a usable, factual replacement for the previous false subject matter that has been taught by them. I hope and pray that all that needs to be given to our teachers is the facts and that of their own will and of their own initiative they will correct the situation.

My solution to this is not to have a separate course in Negro history. (However a separate course might serve as a successful system of educating our present teachers.) We have for too long kept the Negro separate from "our" history, "our" culture, and "our" lives. This is not so. The Negro is a very integral part of "our" history, "our" culture and "our" lives. The solution is to rewrite or at least "reteach" our history accurately by integrating the Negro and his achievements into their proper places. The end would then be one history and one people--truly "one nation." I hope in the near future we will without thinking, automatically include the Negro when we talk of "our" whatever it may be. The Negro has played a significant role in America's history. This story is only now becoming known. Also, the pictures and illustrations in our textbooks should contain Negroes. This should apply to all text books--not just history.

My purpose in writing this paper is to provide a working bibliography which lists books (from two libraries in Arkadelphia) that can be obtained, read, studied, and their facts and information properly inserted in order that we might for the first

time teach American history in our school systems to our children as it actually occurred and as it should be taught-- truthfully and accurately. The two libraries that I used as sources from which to compose my bibliography are the Arkadelphia Public Library and Riley Library on Ouachita campus.

The best source I found was Eyewitness: The Negro in American History by William L. Katz. (This book was not to be found in either of the two libraries.) It illuminates the contributions of Negroes in every period of our history--from the early explorers to today's champions of true equality and civil rights. Cowboys, doctors, scientists, soldiers, masons, poets, actors, political figures, revolutionary leaders--their stories dramatically unfold as an integral part of the larger history of America.

Clearly written narratives of every period set the stage for eyewitness accounts drawn from letters, army records, travel accounts, magazines, and other authentic sources of the times--many never before published. Here then--in the words of the author William L. Katz and in the comments and records of his fellow Americans--is the Negro in American history. This book is organized along the lines of typical courses in American history.

In my opinion, and based on my limited knowledge, this is the best history book in print of the American Negro. It is a full-sized, intense picture of what Negroes have endured

for four hundred years--truly a happening in black and white.

An integral part of the American experience from the beginning, the Negro has left his stamp on his country's institution. Since 1492, he has been a factor in many of the issues in American history. Far more than is generally realized, his role in American history was a positive one, as he spoke and acted of his own volition. Negroes who have made significant contributions are:

- (1) 1492--Alonso, a Negro, served as pilot on Christopher Columbus' ship.
- (2) 1528--Stephan Dorantez (Estovanico) found the Seven Cities of Gold. Also called "Little Stephen." Chief scout in the 1528 Cabeza de Vaca expedition into Florida.
- (3) Benjamin Banneker, a Maryland free Negro; a farmer and scientist, was chosen by President George Washington to serve on the commission that planned the city of Washington, D.C. He also published an almanac for 10 years that provided information about the sun, moon, and tides. Banneker's Almanac. Thomas Jefferson was so impressed with it that he sent copies to French scientists and wrote to Banneker telling him of his high regard for the work.
- (4) Phillis Wheatley (1773) is only one example of Negro poets.
- (5) Christopher Attucks was the first martyr to die for American independence.

- (6) Lemuel Haynes was one of several Negro Minutemen who answered Paul Revere's call and who at Concord Bridge on April 19, 1775, fired the shot "heard round the world."
- (7) Negroes also fought at Bunker Hill. Peter Salem and Salem Poor were two heroes of this battle.
- (8) Negroes were in every battle of importance. Other Negroes served as spies on the British for the Americans.
- (9) Andrew Jackson credited a Negro sharp-shooter with firing the shot that caused the death of General Pakenham to win the battle of New Orleans.
- (10) Fourteen Negro Congressmen served during the Reconstruction (1870-76).

#### Inventors:

- (11) Lewis Howard Latimer assisted Bell and Edison. He was an expert electrical engineer and draftsman.
- (12) Granville T. Woods invented devices purchased by Bell, Westinghouse, and Edison.
- (13) Jan Matzeliger invented the machine that revolutionized the shoe industry.
- (14) Garrett A. Morgan invented the gas mask before 1916. He also invented the traffic light.
- (15) Andrew J. Beard invented a device for coupling railroad cars.

#### Miscellaneous:

- (16) Nat Love's friends were Billy the Kid and Jesse James.



(18) Negro Troop C, 9th Cavalry, lead the charge up San Juan Hill.

(19) Negroes have fought in all our wars. (WW I and II and the others).

These Negroes have been listed to mention only a few of tens of thousands of Negroes who have made significant contributions not to mention the ones like you and me who have been good citizens behind the scenes.

The question remains: Will we take the dare? Will we accept the challenge to change what must be changed?

On the following pages you will find a short but complete bibliography up to January 1969 of the books available in the two libraries in Arkadelphia (that I used as sources) on the role of the Negro in American History. (It should be pointed out that this is not a list of all the books in the library on the Negro but rather a list of books that deal specifically with the Negro's role in our history.)

I wish to close this paper by adding my signiature by way of endorsement to this statement. Nothing could express my feelings better.

"We do not believe that things will always continue the same. The time must come when the Declaration of Independence will be felt in the heart, as well as uttered from the mouth, and when the rights of all shall be properly acknowledged and appreciated. God hasten that

time. This is our home, and this is our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers; for it, some of them fought, bled, and died. Here we were born, and here we will die."

--Meeting of New York Negroes, 1831

*Carol Fimbrough, 1969*

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 Work, Monroe Nathan: The Negro in Africa and America.  
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BIBLIOGRAPHY of books on the Negro in American History

Source: These book could and should be ordered.

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Fishel, Leslie H. Jr. and Quarles, Benjamin: The Negro American: A Documentary History.