



The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution

By William Cooper Nell

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In "Colored Patriots of the American Revolution," William Cooper Nell documents the important and oft-forgotten contributions of black Americans who fought during the Revolutionary War. While most history books focus on white heroes such as George Washington, Paul Revere, and Ethan Allen, "Colored Patriots" focuses on the black Americans who fought bravely and heroically for freedom and independence in the American Revolution. When the Revolution started, the American colonies had a population of about two and a half million people, one fifth of whom were black, mostly slaves. The courage and bravery demonstrated by blacks during the Revolution influenced legal decisions in the northern states to abolish slavery, leading to freedom for about 60,000 slaves. Yet for the most part, acts of heroism and the contributions of blacks during the Revolution either went unrecorded or were not widely publicized. "Colored Patriots of the American Revolution" is organized by state, with many historical names mentioned and an account given of the African American involvement state-by-state.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

William Cooper Nell (1816–1874) was an American abolitionist, journalist, author, and civil servant. As an historical author his books, *Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812* (1851) and *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855) became available to the public. These represented the premier exhaustive studies of African Americans. Nell studied law in the early 1830s; however he was never certified as a lawyer because he would not swear allegiance to the Constitution of the United States. He believed it advocated the enslavement of millions African Americans throughout the South and so he could claim no loyalty to it. Around this time, Nell also began his association with acclaimed white abolitionist Garrison and with *The Liberator*. This connection would continue until the paper's termination in 1865. Nell fought for the ideals of Garrison unflinchingly throughout the abolitionist campaign. Nell worked with Frederick Douglass on his abolitionist publication, *The North Star*, from 1848 until 1851. In 1850, Nell lost the Free-Soil candidacy for legislature in his home state. That same year, the Fugitive Slave Law gave Nell new inspiration to continue the fight against slavery. He was prompted to create the Committee of Vigilance, which served a similar purpose to that of the Freedom Association of 1842, but was much more illegal at this point. He encouraged and engaged in the "Underground Railroad". During 1855, *The Liberator* employed Nell to journey around the Midwest and study African American anti-slavery efforts. After the publication of the devastating Dred Scott decision in 1858, Nell orchestrated a remembrance of black Revolutionary martyr Crispus Attucks to remind people of the civil status of African Americans at the time of American separation from England. That same year, Nell organized the Convention of Colored Citizens of New England. This action was decidedly in opposition to his earlier abhorrence of segregated abolitionism, but he argued that this new insult to blacks constituted sufficient reason to act separately. Nell spent the time between publications working for legislation to allow blacks into the Massachusetts military, one of the few struggles of his life in which he was not successful.

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