July 2012

Black Identity: The Road to Emancipation and the Formation of a Black Culture within Upstate New York

Bianca Gross

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.colgate.edu/car

Part of the African American Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.colgate.edu/car/vol6/iss1/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Digital Commons @ Colgate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colgate Academic Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colgate. For more information, please contact seblack@colgate.edu.
Black Identity: the Road to Emancipation and the Formation of a Black Culture within Upstate New York

By Bianca Gross, Class of 2011

The time period of the American Revolution, beginning in 1776, sparked an ideological awakening within the British colonies of America. "The struggle for liberty, Adams suggested to Jefferson, 'was in the Minds of the People, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen Years before a drop of blood was drawn at Lexington.'" In the strokes of Thomas Jefferson's pen, this founding father put into words the political ideology that had been on the minds of the American people for decades. As stated in the Declaration of Independence, the American colonists desired to become their own separate nation apart from the monarchial authority of Great Britain. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson articulated the concerns of the American people by stating that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Jefferson continued by stating that the English government had neglected to respect the unalienable rights of the colonists, and thus the American people were forced to sever ties with the English crown. Through his words, Jefferson was declaring that Americans were being denied their rights as English citizens. Therefore, the American colonists would build a new nation based on the ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence. A common rhetoric used by colonists in order to proclaim their need for separation from the crown was that the Americans were slaves of the English monarch and needed to be free.

Despite this ideology of freedom and equality for all, slavery continued to thrive and was a crucial entity of the United States economy. This ideology, expressed by American colonists, was not lost on the blacks of America. Many blacks took up the call to fight for the Patriots or the British in order to obtain their freedom. In the years following the American Revolution, slaves attempted to establish their own identity and society in the midst of a world that subjugated them and deemed them inferior beings. Although the American Revolution ended in 1783, the battle for Americans, both black and white, to end slavery had just begun. The fight for blacks to establish a unified black identity continued up to the time of the Civil War and beyond.

Although the American Revolution did not free any black slaves, the War of Independence made Americans consciously consider the issue of slavery. "Jefferson's Declaration-not only led

---


many masters to question their ownership of slaves but also strengthened the hand of the enslaved themselves by creating an ideological context which they could advance their demands for freedom.”133 “Enslaved Americans had never accepted their condition, but now, with the stroke of Jefferson’s pen, slavery had become a national ideological issue.”134 Blacks residing in the American colonies had never been passive participants in the slave system, and at times had revolted or preformed some form of behavior that went against the will of their masters. The War of Independence, as Douglas Egerton asserted, gave slaves both an ideological context but also a political forum to argue their desires for freedom. Through the propaganda of the Revolutionary War, white Americans had given their slaves a language of liberty that they simply could not ignore. Coupled with the formation of anti-slavery sentiments by white Americans during the War of Independence, the experiences of black slaves came to the forefront of American culture. The ideology of the evils of the slave society allowed Americans to view blacks as human beings and simply not as tools. In New York, black identity was in the early stages of its formation and was being expressed through newspaper articles and anti-slavery societies. Following the American Revolution, black slaves in New York began to forge their own culture separate from their white counterparts through the use of language, vocational skills, and family structure, despite their continued subjugation.

The anti-slavery movement spread throughout the United States in the years following the American Revolution due to the formation of an American ideology of freedom and equality. In the Northern region of the United States, white Americans were divided in regards to their beliefs on slavery. In New York State, slavery was an essential element of their economy. In contrast to the Southern states, slaves typically served as servants in the homes and farm hands on the land of Northern elites. Other male slaves, especially in urban, coastal areas such as New York City, worked in the harbor, handling goods delivered to these cities on ships. Due to the fact that black slaves were not working long hours of backbreaking labor on plantations, many Northerners created the master myth that slavery in the North was truly a positive entity in the lives of black slaves. “The myth functioned as a defense of the institution, deflecting the main thrust of antislavery criticism and almost certainly delayed the passage of an abolition bill.”135 Through the creation of this myth, Northerner whites were given the privilege of condemning the institution of slavery in the South, while maintaining the presence of slaves within their own state. “Though the farmers, professionals, artisans, and merchants of this area were the heaviest users of slave labor in the North, New Yorkers simply

133 Egerton, 43.
134 Egerton, 63.

could not see a connection between their own benevolent version of slavery and the institution excoriated in anti-slavery tracts.”\textsuperscript{136} Although many New Yorkers would advocate ending slavery in the United States as a long-term goal, few desired to emancipate slavery within New York.

One of the most revealing areas concerning the anti-slavery sentiments of white New Yorkers can be seen in Albany, New York. The Albany area had a significant number of slaves working as both domestics in the home and as field hands. Along with this thriving slave society, individuals in this area, similar to other white Americans, were captivated by the anti-slavery sentiment expressed in the shadow of the American Revolution. Despite this anti-slavery sentiment, white individuals in Albany still desired to maintain the institution of slavery within their own community. This contradicting ideology can be in newspaper articles written in this area that stated the cruelty of slavery within the South, but also published runaway and for sale notices of black slaves. Therefore, the Albany area illustrated both the anti-slavery sentiments expressed by white Northerners as well as the desire of these Americans to maintain the institution of slavery within their own states. The emergence of an anti-slavery movement in Albany allowed for the beginnings of a black identity to be forged. As seen in the Albany newspaper advertisements, black slaves within this area had began to establish their own language, had a variety of vocational skills, and were establishing their own family structure. Therefore, the Albany area represented the contradictory nature of white anti-slavery sentiment in New York as well as illustrated the emergence of a black identity in America.

Anti-slavery sentiments and white sympathy for blacks in Albany was expressed towards slaves in the South within their newspaper articles. An article in the Albany Advertiser on December 11, 1816, articulated the cruelty that white slave hunters used in order to round up a band of runaway slaves in Pocosin Country, Virginia. The writer stated that dogs and guns were utilized in order to disband the Negro camps that had emerged within this area. The party of slave hunters claimed that these Negro runaways were working as farmers and placing a strain on the white yeoman farmers in order to justify their use of cruel treatment towards these runaway slaves.\textsuperscript{137} The writer described the cruelty used to disintegrate these Negro camps with horror but failed to see the connection between these Southern runaway slave hunters and the hundreds of runaway slave notices printed by this writer’s paper. Another article published in the Albany Advertiser on August 8, 1816 spoke of the runaway slave notices printed in Baltimore, Maryland.\textsuperscript{138} This article condemned the way in which all blacks were being captured and imprisoned in the South for the crime of being runaways. The author believed it was a crime to imprison all blacks simply

\textsuperscript{136} White, 80.

\textsuperscript{137} “Edenton, (N.C.),” Albany Advertiser, December 11, 1816, News/Opinion, New York

because they could not prove the legitimacy of their freedom. Both of these articles all published in Albany truly illuminated the sentiment of white New Yorkers. Despite the fact that these newspapers published countless runaway slave notices and for sale notices, which illustrated the desire to preserve slavery within Albany, these writers openly expressed anti-slavery sentiments and condemned the institution of slavery in the South.

Although anti-slavery sentiments were expressed openly in newspaper articles and among some white individuals in New York, little effort was made within the state to eradicate the institution of slavery. The only white New Yorkers who truly attempted to improve the lives of blacks was the members of the New York Manumission Society. This society was formed in 1785 by the congregants of the Church of England and the Society of Friends. The New York Manumission society was largely organized by prominent white elites of New York such as John Jay, Judge James Duane, and Senator Rufus King. The society served several purposes which included attempting “to persuade slave owners of the ‘injustice and Cruelty of their former conduct’” and to articulate the virtues of the emancipation of slavery. The society also strived to pursue lawsuits against kidnappers of slaves and interfered with the selling and purchasing of slaves. The New York Manumission Society strived to advance the lives of enslaved and freed blacks due to their religious principles. These beliefs consisted of anti-slavery sentiments based on the biblical ideology that God created all men equally in his image and thus no human being should remain in chains. Therefore, the New York Manumission Society believed that slavery was an evil in American society and thus the emancipation of slavery should be undertaken. The New York Manumission Society improved the lives of freed blacks through the establishment of schools in order to integrate these individuals into the folds of the United States economic system and to make them productive members of American society. All blacks were allowed to attend these African schools and it was funded through the philanthropic contributions of the Manumission Society members. These African schools were extremely successful in educating blacks in specific trades such as carpentry, blacksmithing, etc. Due to the success of this vocational education, many of the black students were admitted into apprenticeships with various companies in New York City.


140 Hodges, 166.
Despite the success of the New York Manumission Society in improving the lives of blacks, slavery continued to have a significant presence in New York. Many of the key members of the society owned slaves themselves and thus were hesitant to call for the immediate emancipation of slavery. As Shane White articulated, “from its inception the society backed away from confronting the institution head on in New York, being content instead to try and improve the lot of New York free blacks and of slaves within the existing system.”

The official goals of the society, which included eliminating the cruelty of slavery, improving the socioeconomic status of freed slaves, and to interfere in the kidnapping and selling of slaves, illustrated the true intentions of the New York Manumission Society. These goals were concerned with improving the nature of slavery itself and were not concerned with eliminating slavery. Coupled with the fact that many society members owned slaves themselves, it can be asserted that the New York Manumission Society viewed the emancipation of slavery as a long term goal for America as a whole. These members had no desire to immediately end slavery within New York rather they desired to improve the lives of slaves within their subjugation. Thus, the New York Manumission society illustrated the contradictory nature of anti-slavery sentiment in New York during this time period. Similar to other New Yorkers, the society condemned the cruel nature

slavery but had no desire to eliminate the institution of slavery completely within New York State. Therefore, this society dedicated to the emancipation of slavery did not attempt to immediately emancipate the institution of slavery within New York.

On March 31, 1817, blacks won a small victory on the road to the emancipation of slavery within the United States when the Congress of New York issued a decree of Gradual Manumission. The Congress of the United States had enacted a law in 1784 which stated that no slavery or involuntary slavery was to continue in the thirteen colonies after 1800. Despite this legislative action, many states chose to ignore this document and continued participating in the practice of slavery on the basis that the Federal Government did not have the right to dictate the actions of the states. Due to the failure of the United States Government to eliminate slavery within the thirteen colonies, many states chose to write their own policy of manumission including New York. Adopted in 1817, the “Act relative to slaves and servants” stated that after July 4, 1799, all black slaves born in the United States shall be bound to their master till they complete their term of service. For males, the age of completion was twenty-eight, and for females, twenty-five. This act also stated that slaves taken by masters to oversee the needs of the master’s child would be bound to that child till they reached the age of eighteen. According to this law, the slave trade was banned in New York;

---

144 White, 81.

however slave masters were allowed to travel freely with their slaves within New York State. Although the “Act relative to slaves and servants” was created in order to free slaves, this gradual manumission had little effect in freeing blacks immediately. Slaves were still legally bound to serve their master till they completed their term of service and any slave born prior to July 4, 1799 only gained freedom based on the graces of their master. The Gradual Manumission illuminated the contrasting nature of New York anti-slavery sentiments. By limiting the amount of slaves that could actually obtain freedom, New Yorkers were legally permitted to maintain the institute of slavery. New Yorkers criticized Southern states for their cruel treatment of slaves and their continuation of this American evil. However, very few New Yorkers were willing to give up their own slaves.

Based on both the sentiment of white New Yorkers and the legal documents published by the New York Congress, blacks within the state had few civil liberties. Due to the fact that most blacks were working as slaves within the homes of white New Yorkers, most slaves had little to no contact with other members of their race and thus were unable to form a strong black identity. “The small holdings and familial nature of slavery- combined to fragment the slave family and to hinder the development of a slave culture.” Slaves were encouraged to become more Americanized and more like their white counterparts. By fostering an American identity, black slaves had a difficult time establishing their own identity within New York. In general, freed blacks relied on the goodwill of white New Yorkers such as the New York Manumission Society, in order to better their lives and to increase their socioeconomic status. By relying on white elites, blacks were hindering the establishment of strong community bonds within their own race and becoming more integrated within the American culture. The majority of information that can be found concerning black identity was located within runaway notices. These notices illuminated a black culture that was beginning to develop in upstate New York as seen in the diversity of language, family units, vocational skills, etc that blacks established despite their subjugation.

One of the means in which black slaves formed their own identity was through language. As Shane White wrote, “the state of New York, however, was noted for its ethnic diversity and particularly for the large Dutch component in its population.” Due to this large Dutch speaking population within New York, blacks could speak both Dutch and English and formed their own dialectic; a mixture of both languages. The linguistic capabilities of blacks were highlighted in some runaway notices. Although the only evidence of their linguistic skills comes from

---

148 White, 88.
150 White, 189.
runaway notices, it can be assumed that many slaves within the upstate New York area were influenced by the wide diversity of languages within this region and that slaves developed their own unique form of language. An advertisement in the September 6, 1814 issue of the Albany Argus stated that a runaway slave named London Derry could speak English, Low Dutch, and High Dutch.151 This advertisement illustrated the linguistic skills of black slaves in upstate New York. Many slaves within this region learned to speak both the formal and informal language of the European descendents living within upstate New York. The mastering of English, Low and High Dutch can be seen in a variety of runaway notices mainly published in the Albany Gazette. Another runaway notice from the Albany Gazette, October 4, 1813, stated that a runaway named Tom, 22, spoke both Dutch and broken English.152 This advertisement illustrated the diversity of black language but also the cultivation of a language separate from their white masters. Due to the fact that this slave spoke broken English, it can be assumed that this slave had integrated both Dutch and English into his speech. Therefore, this advertisement served as an example of the black language emerging within upstate New York during the early nineteenth century. Although the prevalence of the Dutch language within upstate New York caused many black slaves to speak both the native language of the European descendents in Albany and English, some runaway slave notices illuminated that the linguistic capabilities of blacks were far vaster. Some blacks in the region had an even more diverse linguistic background and could speak three or more different languages. In an advertisement in the Albany Gazette published on March 6, 1815, a runaway slave named Philip, 28 spoke German, Low Dutch, and English153. This advertisement illustrated the linguistic abilities of blacks and the various languages that these blacks encountered living in upstate New York. An advertisement found in the Albany Gazette on May 29, 1820 stated that a runaway slave named Edmund, 22, had the ability to speak English, German, and Low Dutch154, similar to Philip. Both of these advertisements illustrated the depth of the linguistic skills that black slaves possessed. Although some slaves were able to master a variety of languages, other slaves were more limited and could only speak one language. As stated in an advertisement in the August 15, 1815 edition of the Albany Argus, a runaway black slave named Jack, 19, only had the ability to speak Dutch.155 This advertisement illustrated the heavy influence of the Dutch language in the upstate New York region due to the fact that this slave had not learned to speak the language of the American nation.

151 “Fifteen Dollars Reward,” Albany Argus, September 6, 1814, Advertisements, New York.
Based on the information provided by these runaway slave notices, blacks within the Albany area had diverse linguistic skills and possessed a mastery of many languages, most commonly English and Dutch. The prevalence of this language diversity was in large part due to the Dutch culture that emerged among the white colonists of New York, which spread to their black slaves. Through the use of these multiple languages, black slaves were beginning to forge their own identity by creating their own language. The creation of their own language, a mixture of Dutch and English, allowed for a strong connection to be made among members of the black community within the upstate New York region. Although the formation of a black language was beneficial to the black slaves of New York, it caused these blacks to become isolated from others of their race. Black slaves in other states did not have the strong influence of the Dutch culture on their lives and languages, which caused a gap in communication between blacks from New York and blacks in other areas of the United States. Thus, this new black language both served to unify black slaves in New York but also hindered their communication with blacks from other states.

Coupled with the variety of languages that blacks in upstate New York spoke, blacks of this region also altered the way in which they pronounced words in order to further separate their means of communication from white Americans. This separate means of pronunciation was often identified as a speech impediment within runaway slave notices. An example of this can be seen in a runaway slave notice published in the Northern Whig on July 18, 1815. This advertisement stated that two slaves named Mink, 22 and described as having a yellowish complexion with a stout build, and Caesar, 19 and described as having a black complexion, ran away from their master together. The slave named Caesar was also identified as speaking with a speech impediment. Although Caesar was described as having a speech impediment, truly this altering of language was a conscious decision made by this individual and many other slaves within New York State. This speech impediment became characteristic of many black slaves and illustrated the desire of slaves to create their own distinct culture separate from their white masters. Another advertisement illustrating the diversity in the way black slave spoke was seen in the Northern Whig on August 6, 1816. This advertisement stated that a runaway slave named Joe, 22, spoke with a small speech impediment and also spoke quickly. This unique way of speaking was used by slaves to establish their own unique way of speaking in comparison to white Americans and to foster a linguistic connection among blacks. This linguistic connection among blacks of New York, which included the creation of their own language and their own pronunciation of words, allowed for the beginnings of a black identity and culture to form in this region.

---

Along with creating their own diverse language and creating their own way of speaking, blacks also attempted to forge strong family and personal connections among other slaves. Runaway notices in Albany illustrated the desire of slaves to runaway in groups or family units. Through the creation of these families and runaway slave groups, slaves could establish strong black community ties. These black community ties allowed blacks to create their own identity and culture separate from their white American counterparts. The beginnings of these community ties are seen within the runaway notices in New York, which stated that some slaves ran away with other slaves or members of their family. An example of a vast number of black families running away from their masters can be seen in the runaway directory known as The Black Loyalist Directory. Compiled in 1783 by Sir Guy Carleton, a British commander, this directory illustrated the extent to which runaway slaves fled in search of freedom with their family members. This list was comprised of 3,000 black runaway slaves who took refuge in New York City and attempted to join the British army during the American Revolution.\(^\text{158}\) Although many of these black slaves were not originally from New York, this directory served as important insight into the lives of blacks and the family ties they established as early as 1776.

The importance of the family structure in the lives of slaves can be seen in the runaway advertisements published in upstate New York during the period following the American Revolution. These runaway notices illustrated that many slaves fled from subjugation with members of their family in toe in order to preserve the connection between their kin. An advertisement seen in the Albany Gazette published on October 13, 1820 stated that a husband and wife named Lew and Dine, 21, ran away from their master accompanied by another slave named Ben, 18.\(^\text{159}\) Another advertisement published in the Northern Whig on August 16, 1816 highlighted a similar situation in which another husband and wife named Simon and Peggy fled to freedom together.\(^\text{160}\) These advertisements served as an example of the family structure that slaves created, despite their subjugation. Through the creation and preservation of these families, blacks forged their own racial identity and culture. Families were essential to the continuation of black culture. These families would pass on their traditions, beliefs, and culture to future generations, which allowed a distinct black identity to remain within black communities. Due to the importance of the family, many slaves ran away with their children to ensure the preservation of black culture and to provide a life free from enslavement for their offspring. An advertisement in the Albany Register published on January 8, 1813 stated that a mother named Fan, 30


\(^{159}\) “Fifty-Five Dollars Reward,” Albany Gazette, October 13, 1820, Advertisements, New York.

ran away from her master with her nine month old daughter, Diana, when this slave went on a trip to Schoharie County to visit her family and never returned.\footnote{Ran away,” The Albany Register, January 8, 1813, Advertisements, New York.} Several advertisements in the Long Island Star reflected the prevalence of slaves to run away with their children. An advertisement published on November 25, 1812 stated that a black woman ran away with her son.\footnote{“Runaway,” Long-Island Star, November 25, 1812, Advertisements, Brooklyn, New York.} Another advertisement in the Long Island Star published on September 13, 1820 articulated that a black male slave ran away with his three sons from his master’s home.\footnote{“Six Cents Reward,” Long-Island Star, September 13, 1820, Advertisements, Brooklyn, New York.} A final advertisement published in the Long Island Star on December 27, 1820 stated that a father fled from his master’s home with his three children, their ages ranging from 6-12 years old.\footnote{“Six Cents Reward,” Long-Island Star, December 27, 1820, Advertisements, Brooklyn, New York.} All of these runaway advertisements signified the strength and importance of family bonds within the lives of slaves. These slave families gave blacks the power to define their racial identity and culture and to ensure that their traditions would continue for generations to come.

The bonds between slaves were not only seen among family members but were also seen among other slaves. Many runaway notices published in upstate New York illustrated that slaves not only ran away in family units, but also fled from their masters in the company of other slaves, who they worked with. This shared suffering allowed slaves to form a connection among other members of their race, which can be seen in the choice of many slaves to flee with non-familial companions. Several advertisements in the Albany Gazette brought to light this bond that black slaves were beginning to form. A slave runaway notice published in the Albany Gazette on February 5, 1810 stated that a black boy named Sam, 8-9 years old, ran away with a man named Tom. This particular runaway group was captured in Albany and had been taken to the Albany Watch-House.\footnote{“A Negro Boy,” The Albany Gazette, February 5, 1810, Advertisements, New York.} Another advertisement published in the Albany Gazette on July 13, 1812 entitled “One Hundred Dollar Reward” stated that two runaway black men named Anthony, 20, and Price, 18, ran away from their master together. The advertisement continued by stating that these slaves could speak both High and Low Dutch and that both slaves fled away with valuables owned by their master.\footnote{“One Hundred Dollars Reward,” Albany Gazette, July, 13, 1812, Advertisements, New York.} This advertisement not only illustrated the cultural bonds that slaves had but also the linguistic skills of the slaves in the Albany area. The final advertisement in the Albany Gazette entitled “Ninety Dollar Reward” published on May 4, 1815 stated that three slaves ran away together. The first slave named Harman, 22, was described as being well built and having fled with several articles of clothing from his master. The second slave, Yat, 18, spoke
both broken English and Low Dutch. The final slave named Peet, 21, spoke Low Dutch and English.\textsuperscript{167} This advertisement highlighted both the prevalence of black runaways to flee in groups and also another cultural bond formed among many blacks in this region, linguistic diversity. These slave advertisements published in the Albany Gazette illustrated the cultural bonds that blacks formed with one and another outside of the familial ties. This bond with non-family members was pivotal in the formation of a black identity, a racial connection, and a unified culture.

Black identity was not only wrapped up in their language capabilities and their familial/cultural ties but their identity was also defined by what they could contribute to American society. Vocational skills were essential in establishing black culture, giving them significance in the world and in the United States. Black slaves held a variety of jobs and skills, which allowed them to contribute to the socioeconomic system of America. As described in a For Sale notice in The Albany Gazette published on December 19, 1811, a slave, 23, was defined as possessing excellent skills as a house servant and an understanding of the farming business.\textsuperscript{168} Another advertisement published in the Daily Advertiser in New York City on February 10, 1798 illustrated the diversity of black skills. This advertisement stated that this particular slave worked as a housekeeper, a servant in the kitchen, and generally was proficient in domestic duties.\textsuperscript{169} These two advertisements illustrated that black slaves held a variety of jobs within the slave system and were capable of performing many household and farming tasks. These particular skills not only made slaves desirable to white masters but also allowed blacks to contribute to the American lifestyle. These skills set blacks apart from their white counterparts, largely due to the fact that white individuals refused to perform such menial labor. However, these distinct vocational capabilities contributed to the creation of a black culture within upstate New York.

As illustrated in runaway slave notices published in newspapers in the Albany area, blacks were also hired as apprentices and indentured servants. By serving as indentured servants and apprentices, slaves were given the opportunity to learn skills that they could not normally obtain while serving in the typical slave role as a house servant or a farm hand. Through this education, slaves were given the power to transfer this knowledge to fellow members of their race and future generations. By passing on these skills to other blacks and their children, blacks were establishing traditions and skills that would make their presence vital in America separate from performing manual labor. Indicated in several runaway notices, some slaves served as indentured servants for white masters. In two advertisements published in 1816, one in the Saratoga Journal\textsuperscript{170}, Ballston

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Spa, New York, and the other in the Ostego Herald, Cooperstown, New York, two boys named Matthew and Sam Cooly served as indentured servants for their masters. Both boys were only nineteen, which thus illustrated that young males were used as indentured servants rather than older slaves. A runaway advertisement published in The Albany Register on July 14, 1812 stated that an indentured servant named Richard Hamilton ran away from his master. Two final advertisements published in 1820 in the Albany Argus and The Bee, Hudson New York, stated that two slaves were serving as indentured servants. Both slaves fled from their masters and it is believed that they may have run away on ships. By serving as indentured servants, these blacks were learning skills which established their presence within the socioeconomic system of America.

Besides serving as indentured servants, blacks also served as apprentices. By serving as apprentices, slaves were being taught a specific skill that could be marketable in America as a whole. Thus, slaves were given skills that gave their race significance outside of manual labor and allowed slaves to succeed in the economic system of the United States. Newspapers in the Albany area highlighted the prevalence of blacks serving as apprentices to white businesses and masters during the early nineteenth century. In a runaway notice in the Balance newspaper published in Albany on May 5, 1809 stated that a runaway slave named John Aumock, 19, was serving as an apprentice to a Tarrying and Currying business. Another advertisement published in October 1809 by The Bee, Hudson, newspaper stated that a slave named Elanson Mead, 19, ran away from his master after serving as an apprentice. A final advertisement published in the Albany area in The Albany Gazette on December 10, 1812 highlighted the running away of John King, 18, who was serving as an apprentice for a local business. All of these runaway advertisements articulated the number of slaves serving as apprentices to a variety of businesses. By serving as apprentices, slaves were gaining the opportunity to learn marketable skills that would be passed onto other slaves and to future generations. This variety in black occupation allowed slaves to be implemented within the economic system and illustrated the importance of black vocational skills within America as a whole. Blacks were not simply tools to be used in manual labor, but human beings that could benefit the economy and society of the United States.

Through linguistic skills, vocational skills, and family ties, black slaves forged their own culture separate from white America despite their subjugation. In an effort to form this black culture and identity, blacks also revolted and stole clothes from their

172 Six Cents Reward,” The Albany Register, July 14, 1812, Advertisements, New York.
master upon fleeing in order to rebel against the white New Yorkers that enslaved them. Three slaves in the Albany area rebelled against their enslavement by setting Albany on fire. These three slaves, Pompey, Bet, and Dean, launched a plan to set fire to Albany in November 1793 in order to show their disapproval with the state of black servitude. Although these three slaves did successfully set fire to the city of Albany, all three blacks were arrested and executed. Through this act of rebellion, these black slaves caused the conditions for all slaves to worsen in Albany due to the fear that white New Yorkers had of slave rebellions in the future. This fear caused white individuals to keep blacks enslaved in order to protect their communities from the perceived dangerous nature of freed blacks. Despite their good intentions, this fire in Albany only strengthened the legitimacy that New Yorkers had in regards to their fear of slaves. An article published in the Albany Argus on September 12, 1820 also illustrated that black slave revolts were not simply a rare occurrence in this region. This article stated that a black runaway slave encountered a white man within the woods. When the white man attempted to capture this runaway, this slave attacked the white man. In the midst of fight, the white man killed the runaway slave. This article highlighted both the extent to which slaves will go to maintain their freedom but also that black slaves truly did revolt against their white New Yorkers who attempted to keep them in chains. Finally, black revolt was seen within New York City as described in Graham Hodges novel, Slavery, Freedom, and Culture among Early American workers. In one of Hodges’ essay, he highlighted the work of the Black Brigade and the Black Pioneers, who took up arms in the American Revolution for their freedom from 1775-1783. Although this revolt did not occur within the Albany area, the work of these black organizations to obtain their freedom through revolt was still significant in the formation of black culture within New York as a whole.

Black slaves also revolted against their masters by running away with their master’s property. Although this form of rebellion against their masters was not as brutal as taking up arms against them, by stealing their master’s property, slaves were disrespecting their master’s authority. Three advertisements published in the Albany Gazette, two on July 20, 1812 and one on September 14, 1815 illustrated the number of slaves that stole clothes from their masters. All of these runaway slaves stole articles of clothing from their masters and one slave named David Lord, 33, stole five horses and $500 worth of laundry from his master. Two advertisements published in the Northern Whig in

Hudson, New York on July 12, 1811 and on June 25, 1816 stated that two runaway slaves stole several items of clothing from their master including pants, vests, and shirts. In an advertisement in the Albany Register published on April 4, 1815 stated that a slave girl named Flora, 22, ran away with a Black Muslim gown, a hat, boots, and a bear skin muff. These runaway notices all illustrated the prevalence of slaves running away and stealing articles of their master's property. This form of mild revolt not only disrespected their master's authority but also served as rebellion against the slave system that they hated.

In conclusion, black slaves formed their own culture separate from the white community through their language and vocational skills, familial units, and rebellion. By utilizing these tools, slaves were given the power to establish their own identity and culture. These slaves were also given the power to firmly cement their presence within America. Forming a diverse and rich culture allowed black slaves to be seen as significant to the society of New York but also significant to America as a whole. Blacks would continue to forge their own culture and identity through religion, which helped blacks to have a unified culture in America. The formation of such churches as The African Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City allowed blacks to use the factor of religion to unify their culture. Therefore, in the years following the American Revolution, blacks utilized several factors such as language, diversity, family, technical skill, revolt, and religion to forge their own identity and culture within New York in the years following the American Revolution.

---

185 “Five Dollars Reward,” The Albany Register, April 4, 1815, Advertisements, New York.
187 Richard Allen and Jacob Tapsico, The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Philadelphia, John II. Cunnigham, 1817.)