Table of Contents

There is a River – A Mighty River: Social and Economic Contributions of Africans along the Hudson, from the Dutch Period to The American Revolution

A. J. Williams-Myers
Black Studies Department
State University of New York
New Paltz, New York

Introduction: A Celebratory Comment

It is fitting that New York celebrates the four hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain to what has become known as the Empire State. Yet at the same time this "fitting" becomes somewhat marred when it is evident that the honorific label *Empire* bestowed upon the state is shrouded in irony, given that it came in the wake of empire building as Europeans, as early as the seventeenth century, scrambled to lay claim to as much of the Earth's surface and resources as was humanly possible. This is not stated to play down the historical accomplishments of Hudson and Champlain, for their voyages of exploration in technologically advanced, maritime vessels, under the flags of the Dutch and French, respectively, linked the Mohawk River/ North River (Hudson) region, as with other regions in that "scramble", to a larger socio-economic and political world. Now, four hundred years later, after the rise and fall of empires, New York, having jettisoned the shackles of colonial rule in the eighteenth century, stands as a model of stability for socioeconomic and political growth. In the more than two hundred and thirty odd years since the American Revolution, the Empire State counts among its laurels an inclusively, democratic governing systems that is highly reflective of its racially diverse population.

What is not reflective of its racially diverse population nor as well claimed as one of the state's laurels is a history that clearly places Africans at a distance from the center of history, a position to which they were relegated with the collapse of empire. Hudson and Champlain take center stage in historical reconstruction but the African, a key variable in the exploitation of natural resources and economic growth, is given the margin, thus rendering what is written in "altered states" or distorted. In an early monograph I wrote about the educational tragedy of such a history and the need to be more inclusive in historical reconstruction. "In many ways such a distortion has [I wrote back then] equally distorted the larger picture of … European-Americans. With[out] a truer image of the role and of the contributions of … African-Americans…, it is impossible for us to conceptualize or perceive an imagery that is the heritage of us all. So long as the picture remains distorted through the omission of data and/or the marginalization of African Americans, we are all losers."

It is, therefore, the purpose of this succinct, historical script on the one hand, to methodologically resurrect a key actor in the script, the African, from a death of peripheral, historical insignificance. On the other hand it is to tell a more realistic story of the contributions of enslaved and free Africans to the overall economic growth of Hudson Valley society as well as their military role in the nation's revolutionary struggle to win freedom from England, ironically something denied them. But first, a few words about A Mighty River.

There Is A River, A Mighty River

There is a river, A Mighty River, known earlier as the North River but now by its honorific name – in honor of Henry Hudson - the Hudson River. The river runs its course from deep in the mountainous regions of northeastern New York to its estuary far to the south. Over the centuries the river's tide has risen and fallen, its waters have ebbed and flowed, swirled and tumbled over glacial rocks lodged as rapids, narrowed at its northern extreme, widens at mid-run upon scenic vistas like its flow between the towering escarpments acting as Egyptian warriors guarding the entrance to the Highlands as the river's waters silently empty into what can be called the Bay of Peekskill, then it's on to scenic Haverstraw and Tappan, where beyond the river narrows again for its run below the majestic Palisades to the west, then on to the estuary and into the Atlantic Ocean. On its run south, lesser rivers feed the Mighty One with water, which at times during heavy rain run-off and/or early spring meltdown of snow from higher elevations, is astir with silt from top soil swept up from the hinterland that inundates and further enhances potentially rich agricultural adjacent land and floodplains on the valley floor. As a result, some of the most fertile land in the Hudson Valley abuts the Mighty River and its tributaries, while hills, dells, mountains and precipitous ridges are blanketed with a lush variety of vegetation such as pine, cottonwood, oak, willow and cedar, and among which dwell many species of birds and animals. Scattered about the region are indigenous bands of Algonquin-speakers who, along with the other forms of life, are locked in an attractive, peaceful and bucolic ecological niche, and all nurtured and sustained by the life-giving force of the Mighty River, the Hudson. There is a river.

The Intrusive Dutch And Their Alien Economic System Bolstered By Enslaved African Labor

There is a river, A Mighty River, whose peaceful, bucolic world was disrupted by foreigners from afar lured by the prospect of riches but as well by the river's apparent mystic origins, an added incentive to penetrate into the depths of the interior from which it flows. Since I have written about the nature of these foreigners in earlier monographs and in a forthcoming journal article, suffice to say that in the wake of Henry Hudson's voyage, and while laying claim to an enormous swat of land within a hundred mile radius that was named New Netherlands and its entrepot, New Amsterdam, at the river's mouth, the Dutch, in penetrating the river's interior, by the mid-seventeenth century had usurped the power of land ownership from the bands of Algonquian-speakers. Under a precapitalist economic system of mercantilism and in a way to shore up what was becoming an uneconomic colonial venture built around the fur trade, the Dutch West India Company introduced the alien form of land tenure called patroonships. These were privately owned land grants of enormous acreages, envisioned as potentially rich agricultural schemes, and were held by wealthy individuals from Holland or company officials. The owners carried the title of Patroon, with some never in resident. The grants were business ventures, and under the terms of the 1629 *Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions* and a later agreement of 1635, the company agreed to "exert [itself] to provide the patroons [and colony] with persons [whites] bound to service" along with paid laborers. But because white laborers were not as forthcoming as had been anticipated, more emphasis was put on the use of Native Americans who had lost their lands and imported Africans from the West Indies and Africa, both enslaved property of the company. The African

could be acquired from the company for cash, barter, credit, or through lease. Between 1639 and 1664, although most Africans imported into New Netherlands arrived from the West Indies from islands like Barbados, Antigua or Jamaica, a good 30% were imported directly from West African coastal ports below present-day Nigeria.

By 1664 the year the Dutch lost control of New Netherlands to the British, they had been able to establish only two patroonships: Rensselaerwyck on the upper Hudson, the personal holding of Kiliaen van Rensselaer a director of the Dutch West India Company and who preferred Holland over residence on his grant in the Hudson Valley, and Pavonia of Michael Pauw on the lower river across from New Amsterdam. Most of the imported enslaved labor, other than that used north at Rensselaerwyck and at the fur trading post of Fort Orange (Albany), worked on bouries (farms) adjacent to New Amsterdam, on the Pavonia patroonship, and were held as enslaved laborers by business professionals like bankers, merchants, lawyers, clergymen, and a host of other ordinary, urban dwellers in New Amsterdam. Slavery, though, as an institution under the Dutch can be said to have been an "immature slave system" where "half freedom" for Africans was more like a lifetime of indentured servitude, and/or "a matter of custom rather than law." There just had not been sufficient time for the Dutch to structure a harsher slave system as existed on their sugar islands in the Caribbean. A mature, more dehumanizing system awaited the coming of the British. When that time did come, rather than have to face a devastating defeat at the hands of the powerful British naval and land forces, Peter Stuyvesant, the governor of the colony at the time, sought surrender. There is a river.

In The Footsteps Of The Dutch: British Colonial Rule On The Hudson

There is a river, A Mighty River whose majestic flow of life sustaining waters and potential cornucopia of wealth of the natural resources from its hinterland, drew the British fleet in conquest of the Dutch: overlords of Algonquian-speakers and slave owners of Africans to whom they had given "half freedom" that defined the enslaved by "a matter of custom rather than law". But that was to change as New Netherlands became New York after the Duke of York the sole proprietor, New Amsterdam became New York, patroonships became manors with Manor Lords, persons [whites] bound to service – indentured servants – became linked to tenant farmers on manors, and so did Dutch slavery change under the British, metamorphosing into a more entrenched, potentially explosive system. Under what became the Duke's Law of 1665, slavery in New York was no longer "a matter of custom" but was by law "a matter of color." There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River, along which on the valley floor, under the leadership of New York's colonial Governor Dongan in the 1680s, and following the lead of the Dutch, a series of liberal grants of patents, manors and the dispersal of yeomanry throughout the valley were put in place to ensure that continuity. A few interrelated families monopolized the most productive lands on the valley floor. Among some of those families, and whose manors carried their names, were the Rensselaers, Livingstons, Beekmans, Philipses, and the van Cortlandts. The acreages of the land holdings varied from as little as 21,000 of Henry Beekman, Jr's two Rhinebeck patents, to as much as 850,000 on Rensselaerwyck Manor, just north of the 160,000 acres held by the Living-

ston family to the east of the River. The largest grant on the valley floor was the Hardenbergh Patent of 1,500,000 acres, which in the present century would comprise most of Ulster, Sullivan, Delaware and Greene counties. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River whose manor lords had hoped to attract tenant farmers under usufructuary agreement to exploit the lands agriculturally for mutual gain but with the larger share going to them. Disenchanted with tenant farming, those who were able took up yeomanry on the valley slops, but on lands not as fertile as that on the valley floor, and which eventually became a deterrent for prospective small-scale farmers, thus undermining the efforts of manor lords to attract tenant farmers and other New York settlers. Among those who took up yeomanry under a 1686/7 patent grant given them by Governor Dongan was a diverse group of farmers from Manhattan Island, with some from farms around the Fresh Water Pond. Named the Tappan Patent on land at the lower end of the valley in what is today Rockland County and northern New Jersey on the river's west bank, the grant had among its patentees three Afro-Dutchmen from that Fresh Water Pond community of African-descendants, John De Vries, Claes Emanuels, and Augustine Van Donck, and whose holdings by late eighteenth/early nineteenth century became the historical roots for the Ramapo People who live on and around the mountains of the same name. There is a River.

Enslaved African Labor Under The British

There is a River, a Mighty River on which African enslaved laborers were conveyed to manor lords and other buyers along the river to as far north as Albany, west of Rensselaerwyck, having first been purchased by agents and/or creditors in lots from

Atlantic slavers berthed at wharfs in and around New York. For example, on 17 October 1748, Gerard G. Beekman of New York City, acting as agent for his brother, James, and others who resided in Kingston, wrote an agent of his in Rhode Island inquiring of slaves. "I received yours of the 10 instant and observe you have for sale one young negro wench and child of 9 months. If she is likely brisk and no bad quality the two will fetch fifty pounds or more." In another example of purchase and/or sale, Cadwallader Colden who had an estate in Newburgh, as well as a residence in New York, wrote to a Doctor Home of New York in December 1721 with a request to purchase for him three enslaved to be used at the Newburgh estate. He wanted two males to be about eighteen years of age and of good temper, and an African girl of about thirteen years of age. "My wife desires her chiefly to keep the children and to sow…one that appears to be good natured." Before the turn of the eighteenth-century, Africans around Albany were sold outright by agents and owners or rented out for a number of years at prices established in marketable goods (winter wheat, beaver pelts, lumber, peas) or Dutch guilders. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River that if it could talk would tell of the numbers and ethnic diversity of Africans imported into the colony. They were Ewe, Fanti, Akan, Yoruba, and Hausa, all from West Africa, Bakongo from south-central Africa, and an array of ethnics from Madagascar off the coast of East Africa. Many were urban laborers working the docks, linked to a number of construction schemes, and tending to day-to-day domestic duties, among which were cooking and caring for their owners' children. There were those who drained water-logged areas for agricultural purposes, cut trees for the lumber mills, cared for the farm animals, worked the iron foundries as well as assumed key positions in the maritime trade, all crucial roles played by Africans in the

social and economic development of New York's colonial economy. Some of the roles were interchangeable in terms of gender, though most were structured for male or female. A visitor to the Hudson valley homes of the Livingstons in Columbia County in the 1790s, William Strickland, observed at the home of Robert Livingston "four black boys…barefooted and in livery green…waited about the [breakfast] table…Three black men in livery green waited at dinner…It is not unusual for female blacks to wait; an instance of which we met with yesterday at Mrs. Livingston's, [Margaret Beekman Livingston the mother of Robert]". A French refugee at Albany could write that "the negroes before going to their work, assisted the negress to milk the cows…The days we made butter…Minck remained to turn the handle of the churn, a task which was too difficult for a woman…" There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River along which slave holdings could range from 1-5 on small-scale farms, where owner and enslaved worked the fields together and inhabited the same dwelling structure with Africans bedded down in the kitchen, attic or basement. 1-5, perhaps closer to 1-3, enslaved was the holdings in the mid- to late seventeenth century for the growing number of freeholders throughout the valley, as was the case in southern Orange County in settlements like Haverstraw, Nyack and Tappan Landing (Piermont) in what would become Rockland County by 1798, though one family, the Willem Sickel family, held among themselves 18 enslaved, with one son, William, holding 7 enslaved. The white farmers, in and around these three southern Orange County settlements, with their holdings of 1-5 enslaved in the eighteenth-century into the nineteenth, did produce an assortment of products for markets in New York City and the Atlantic commercial network like flax, wheat, rye, buckwheat and lumber.

But on the whole, the 1-5 enslaved per household held, and the count was similar for tenant farmers as well. Slave holdings did range higher for some manor lords and with individual entrepreneurs, such as the thirty or more held by Adolph Philipse on his upper and lower manors of Philipsburg at Tarrytown and the Manor House at Yonkers, as well as for the two largest holders Sir William Johnson of the adjacent Mohawk Valley and Lewis Morris. Morris, the largest slave-holder in Westchester County, upon his death in 1691 held a total of sixty-six enslaved, while Johnson operated a lumber business with an enslaved labor force said to have exceeded sixty. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River whose story to tell is that of skilled and semi-skilled African laborers as key to the profitability of economic schemes. Before the arrival of large numbers of white immigrants from Europe in the late eighteenth/nine-teenth century, the African, as stated above, was the cook, the washer woman, the coachman, the Nanny, the miller, the ironsmith, the lumber jack, the carpenter, the wheelwright, caretaker of an assortment of farm animals, dock workers at the many ports along the river, and served as crew members on vessels that sailed the Hudson and Atlantic to foreign ports. The skilled position of miller was held by Africans at both the upper and lower gristmills on the Philipse's two manors. Both sites remained, up to the Revolution, "equipped to handle grinding, bolting and the packing of flour," trades in which the enslaved Africans were highly skilled. This comes through in the 1750 sale of Adolph's personal possessions at his death. One of the Africans to be sold, either alone or with the mills at Philipsburg, was a "Miller" or "Negro man that understands grinding." Mirroring Sir Johnson's use of Africans in the lumber business, on their up river estate at Old Saratoga (Schuylerville), the Schuyler's enslaved males cut trees in the

winter and, at an adjoining sawmill, milled them into planks, staves (for barrels), and other articles for the West Indian market where they were shipped along with the year's production of flour.

There is a river, A Mighty River on whose currents swift sloops sailed laden with a variety of agricultural and manufactured goods produced with highly skilled enslaved African labor. Travelers through the valley constantly remarked on the quantity and quality of goods conveyed to river ports and ferried down the river to New York and foreign destinations. Between 1759 and 1760, Burnaby remarked that "the people carry on an extensive trade…They export chiefly grain, flour, skins, furs, pig iron, lumber, and staves [as well as] the manufacture of a small quantity of cloth." Production and exports were so successful, and much to the credit of skilled and semi-skilled African labor, both enslaved and free, that by the time of the American Revolution, New York was one of England's wealthiest colonies along the eastern seaboard. So much so that exactly two years before the War, Henry J. van Rensselaer of Ressenelaerwyck at Claverrack in Columbia County could send a sloop down the Hudson filled with goods destined for markets in New York City and those of the Atlantic commercial network. The sloop's manifest of June 1774 read: 6578 pitch-pine boards, 1331 bushels of wheat, 243 barrels of flour, 52 ½ firkins of butter, 186 barrels of corn, and 1 horse and carriage. All produced by enslaved African labor. There is a river.

British Slavery: Its Inhuman Nature

There is a river, A Mighty River whose story tells of the use of skilled and semi-skilled enslaved Africans in the profitable economic exploits of the valley's natural re-

sources while their humanity remained shackled to the heinous slave codes of the Duke's Law, creating, as of 1665, a highly volatile institution of slavery from that under the Dutch. The slave codes and further codification under the Duke's Law added to the volatility of the system as British officials sat about determining social behavior in how black, white, Christian and heathen related to one another. Through a series of legislative decrees and amendments between 1665 and 1717 the British government sought to create a more closed system of slavery than had existed previous to their take over. Africans because of their color and the nature of their incorporation into colonial New York were defined as slave, powerless, and all newborns followed "ye state and condition of the mother." Baptism (Christian conversion) did not change the status of the enslaved. In the wake of the murder of the William Hallet, Jr. family in Newtown, Queens County in 1708 and the "Negro Plot" of 1712 in New York City, both the end result of the volatility that gripped the lower reaches of the river and reverberated north, "An Act for Preventing, Suppressing and Punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves" was passed by the colonial legislature. The Act limited the numbers of Africans in a group to "no more than three…other than in the employ of masters." Punishment was to be done by the town's "common Whipper," and the enslaved caught with hot coals without the permission of his/her owner was summarily put to death. Europeans because they were white were free and powerful, and white indentured servants were protected by an amended law of 1674 that read "no Christian shall be kept in bondslavery." There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River along whose banks resound the cries and moans of enslaved couples, families and friends who suffered the pain of separation as owners

sought maximization of profits from the sale of their human property, or as punishment directed at a sibling and/or offspring of a brother or father who fought tenaciously against total depersonalization. Andries, the skilled groom in the Rensselaer stables, was one of those tenacious fighters against total domination in the mid-seventeenth-century, so much so that Jeremaias expressed his concern in a letter to his brother Jan in Holland.

> You write of me to send over the negro Andries, but the friends have advised me against this, saying that it would be nothing but foolishness to try to have him serve you in a free country, as he would be too proud to do that. I have noticed that in his manner. It is bad enough here to get him to do so, so that at times I have to punish him for it.

One who lost the fight was a mother in the household of Cadwallader Colden of New-burgh. In 1717 Colden alarmed over a female slave's "negative" influence over her children and her growing independence of mind showed no remorse when he made the decision to break up the slave family by sending the mother to be sold in Barbados. In a letter to a friend on that island he confided:

> I send by this vessel, the Mary Sloop, Capt. Edward Harely Commander, a negro woman and child…she is a good house negro…Were it not for her allusive tongue, her sullenness… I would not have parted with her…I have several of her children I value and I know if she would stay in this country she would spoil them.

For Sojourner Truth, the cries and moans of the powerless in the face of the powerful to hold on to loved ones cut deep into her young heart. Her childhood remembrances of seeing most of her nine brothers and sisters sold off to other white families "created an open wound on her heart and became fuel in years to sustain her desire to be free." There is a river.

African Cultural Contributions And Defiant Black Communities

There is a river, A Mighty River that if it could talk would, no doubt, tell of the greed for profit at any cost and its consequential fostering of racial hatred that unleashed some of the most satanic crimes against enslaved Africans to make them forever stand in fear. But the river as well would tell of the cultural contributions of Africans in spite of the violence that confronted them daily. Although the African was physically oppressed and spiritually under siege by western religions to conform, he/she held firmly to African cultural traditions, and as has been suggested elsewhere that "in the process of acculturation the slaves made European forms serve African functions. European forms here means the Dutch spring festival of Pinkster, into which, over time elements of African rituals were incorporated into the festival, so that by the mid-eighteenth-century Pinkster became all but in name an African festival, celebrated for a week the seventh Sunday after Easter.

In the words of the 1803 "Pinkster Ode" "Every colour revels there [on Pinkster Ground]. From ebon to lillie fair…From lowest born to high degree…" On Pinkster ground in Albany, celebrants were presided over by an enslaved African-born prince with the title of King Charles. Men and women, boys and girls, young and old used the festivities to drink deeply of a week of "freedom" from distress. They marched the Guinea dance, "Dancing true in gentle metre, moving every limb and feature as they competed in such dances as the "jig" and "breakdown," and demonstrated their physical dexterity with the "shake-down" – a shingle on which the contestants stood while it was shaken vigorously by members of the opposing side. People played and competed in

other games, wore African dress for the occasion, and prepared traditional African foods for consumption by those of "ebon to lillie fair." It was, therefore, through this European form that African traditions – Africanisms – were able to survive within the institution of slavery in New York encapsulated in the celebration of Pinkster. These were passed on from generation to generation, reinforced and strengthened with the arrival of Africans from the continent, and, in time, left as markings of a people who in spite of slavery "carved social space" while forging their image on the land. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River that if it could talk would tell of the persistency of African yeomanry and/or freeholders in disregard of the 1713 Queen Anne decree against such property owners. The existence of free African communities and property holders stretched back to early Dutch settlements. They were that initial half freedom group released by the Dutch West India Company in 1644, and went up above New Amsterdam to build homes and cultivate lands adjacent to the Fresh Water Pond (The Collect). It was a few among them, "free black and mulatto males who bought shares in the Tappan Patent in the upper Hackensack River Valley." As stated above, two of the shareholders were Claes Manuel (Emanuel) and John De Vries with extensive land-holdings in northeast New Jersey on the lower Hudson, and whose descendants of mixed African, European and Native American heritage settled in the Ramapo Mountains, in such present-day towns like Mauwau, New Jersey and Hillburn, New York. The racially mixed Ramapo community was one of many such communities up and down the valley, put together in defiance of legislative decrees to further harden racial boundaries. On land that at times was marginal, not as agriculturally endowed as land on the valley floor, the people created caring, nurturing, and religious communities that were free of racial

strife, thus an attraction for interracial couples not as accepted in the larger sur-rounding towns. As to the communities' attraction, one source stated that Mary Woods, from New Jersey, white and with child, fled with Ned, an enslaved African, from his owner to such a community, perhaps among the Ramapo people. Ned was the father of the child.

Further up the valley there were the communities of "Eagle's Nest" in the mountains of Hurley in Ulster County, "Freemanville" and "Baxtertown" east and west, respectively in southern Dutchess County, "The Hills" near Harrison in West Chester, and on the lower western rim of the river escarpment of the Palisades, Skunkhallow. The description of a free black presence in Kinderhook, Columbia County during the Revolution by a young Hessian Officer, paints a vivid picture of what such a community was like. "[In the town] many families of free negroes are also met with here…It is an amusing sight to see a young negress – her wooly hair gathered up in a knot behind, a sun-bonnet perched upon her head, and encircled by a wrap – ambling along, with a [young] negro…shuffling in her wake…" As is very evident, given such a vivid description, in spite of any legislative decrees to remove African property holders from the tax rolls, he/she was steadfast in forging their image into the landscape. And it could be argued, in another paper, that these mixed communities were, historically speaking, the way we were on the road to becoming America, but sadly in post-1787 it was "the road not taken." There is a river.

The African Factor In The American Revolution: Center Stage

There is a river, A Mighty River that flows through one of the most majestic, scenic valleys in the eastern United States, and a valley that played a crucial strategic role in the American Revolution. It was a war fought by colonial slave holders for independence from the so-called oppression of British rule, while ironically oppressing and denying that very freedom to enslaved Africans. Yet if the Mighty River could talk it would tell of valiantly, brave Africans, up and down the Hudson River Valley, who figuratively if not literally threw themselves into the conflagration between colonizer and colonized. Caught up in the rhetoric of the Declaration, the African's undeclared war on the peculiar institution – slavery – became an open campaign against the evil of slavery. For him, "whoever invoked the image of liberty, be he American or British could count on a ready response from the [B]lacks." There is a river

There is a river, A Mighty River through whose valley it runs resounds with epic tales of African warriors in earlier war-related conflicts both under the Dutch and British. They were there for Governor Peter Stuyvesant who sought to pacify the "owners of the land" – Native Americans – in the Hudson Valley. In a request to Curacao in the Caribbean he wanted "clever and strong" Africans to pursue the Indians if we are "to possess this country…" Africans – enslaved and free – were there for the British during the French and Indian War in detachments from various counties along the Hudson like Francis Matysa, cordwainer, and Nicholas Manuel, weaver, both with Orange County regiments, 1759 and 1760 respectively. Manuel and Matysa, like all the others, were proud African warriors in support of the British war effort, as well as in quest of their own manhood and freedom; so much so that in a letter to his Philadelphia cousin from Lake George a white soldier, writing of a fierce fire-fight with enemy forces under the

French and Native Americans could state "the Blacks fought more valiantly than the whites." What this lone, white combatant shared with his cousin was a fact of history that lay buried, forgotten, and unsung – relegated to the margins of history. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River, and what those words of that lone, white combatant do is further enhance the methodological resurrection of the African from that death of peripheral, historical insignificance. The African was there, on the ground, of that crucial and strategic battle field of the Hudson Valley when the British sought offensively to split the southern and northern colonies tactically through the capture of the valley in the summer of 1776 and the fall of 1777. The plan of capture was to be carried out through a military maneuver called a pincer, by which British forces under key generals, would move into the valley from three directions: Burgoyne moving south from Canada, St. Ledger moving east along the Mohawk, and a flotilla under General Henry Clinton, as an advance move in July and August of 1776, penetrating the Hudson from the south, and with all three forces meeting at Albany in the fall of 1777 after having successfully crushed what the British considered to be simply a colonial uprising. But to their chagrin, it was much more than simply a colonial uprising, it was a revolution that was determined to sever the ties of an unequal relationship of colonial rule but one unwilling to remove the chains from the African who, in an equally unequal relationship, stood shoulder to shoulder with the whites in economically building New York and as well in successfully defeating the British. There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River whose story to tell puts the African there in the Mohawk Valley in the defeat of the forces under St. Ledger by those of General Herke-

mer. He was there along the Hudson as gunner that successfully repulsed Clinton's flotilla back down the Hudson, and where subsequently an iron chain, manufactured at Sterling Iron Works in Orange County with African labor, was stretched across the river between West Point and Constitution Island to prevent further British penetration of the river. The African as well was at the three major battles fought between the forces of the American General Gates and those of General Burgoyne that became a turning point in the war for the Americans. Those battles were Bennington, Stillwater, and Bemis Heights, with all three culminating in British defeat and surrender at Saratoga in October of 1777 along with their Hessian allies, among which were contingents of Afro-Hessians, and all eventually, at the end of the war, evacuated back to the Province of Hess in Prussia. The African was there on the ground and instrumental in the capture of Stony Point on 16 July 1779. A fruit-seller at the fort, Pompey was able to acquire the fort's password, "the fort is ours," and that night of the 16th used it at the gate to successfully assist General "Mad" Anthony Wayne's 1,350 continentals, with many African warriors among them, in the capture of the fort. Yet another heroic epic of African valor relegated to a death of peripheral, historical insignificance.

Historically insignificant as well was the heroic deed of the African warrior James Peterson of Cortlandt in Westchester in the eventual capture of Benedict Arnold. As a sentry out on Croton Point on the Hudson, it was Peterson's sharp-shooting that forced Major John Andre, after having received the plans to West Point from Arnold, to seek escape overland through Westchester rather than to a waiting ship in the river and down the Hudson to New York. Andre was captured en route, and eventually tried and hanged in October 1780. "The Blacks fought more valiantly than the whites." "Whoever

invoked the image of liberty, be he American or British, could count on a ready response from the [B]lacks." The need was for "clever and strong" Africans in order to possess this country." There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River where morning mist lingers over the placid waters, and as the rays of light dart from the rising sun to cut through the mist, the effect is that of African warriors returning from the darkness of battle crowned in glory. The African through his heroic deeds both on the battlefield and in the work place, had put to rest, once and for all, the African as historically insignificant, and now assumes his/her rightful place, center stage. As a crack infantryman in the personal bodyguard of General Washington or as a fifer and teamster in the Fifth New York, he was every inch that "stout Black man" sent off to war in place of his owner. With regard to that crack infantryman, Baron Ludwig Von Closen's description of him among American fighting forces is admirable. While at White Plains with his French contingent, he remarked that "a quarter of them [American fighters] were Negroes, merry, confident, and sturdy." There is a river.

There is a river, A Mighty River that if it could talk would remind us that indubitably, when conventional historians write the true history of the African American's role in the Revolution, they will have to confront the assessment not only of Von Closen but also that of Rochambeau's aide, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger. As the French and American allies prepared to cross the Hudson River from Verplanck Point at King's Ferry for the long march south to confront the forces of Cornwallis at Yorktown, Verger observed in July 1781:

> The whole effect was rather good. Their arms were in good condition; some regiments had white cotton uniforms. Their

> clothing consisted of coat, jacket, vest, and trousers of white cloth, buttoned from the bottom to the calves, like gaiters. Several battalions wore little black caps, with white plumes. Only General Washington's mounted guard and Sheldon's legion [included among both were African Americans] wore large caps with bearskin fastenings as crests. *Three-quarters of the Rhode Island regiments consists of Negroes, and that regiment is the most neatly dressed, the best under arms, and the most precise in its maneuvers.*

With the defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown, the Americans were on the road to independence but their partners in that effort were sidetracked to another road to await the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1799 – for newborns to the female enslaved – and the abolition of slavery in 1827. Until that time the Americans' partners-in-arms had to continue to face a victor devoid of compassion and honor, and who preferred property rights over human rights. There is a river.

Conclusion: And The River Flows On

There is a river, a Mighty River, and given what has been written above and in earlier monographs of mine, the African is methodologically resurrected from a death of peripheral, historical insignificance, and/or has come out of the shadows of history and assumed her/his rightful place, Center Stage. And as she/he resumes the historical stage where they have always been, an imagery that is the heritage of us all becomes the story that the river tells as it flows, from generation to generation, down through one of the country's most majestic and scenic valleys, the Hudson Valley, to its estuary and into the Atlantic Ocean to tell all the world. There is a river, A Mighty River…Thank you!