

Directions: Read each Fun History. Be aware that all history is not included in your learning, but like life there are two sides to every story, and every story is incomplete until it has been thoroughly researched. The stories will be discussed in class and used as extra credit at the end of the semester.

FUN HISTORY

Story One: FACT OR FICTION -

First basic fact: the colonies were not paragons of diversity. The vast bulk of them came from one part of Europe, spoke a common language, and worshipped the same God. Suspicion + Dislike = Liberty....the colonial formula for freedom. Nevertheless, the cultural differences that existed even among these British peoples were real, significant, and enduring. Here's a sample of what the early colonists thought of one another.

A Puritan's view on Virginians: "The farthest from conscience and moral honesty of any such number together in the world." Unknown colonist from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. A Virginian's view on Puritans: "A watchful eye must be kept on these foul traders." Virginian William Byrd II. And, finally, the view of an unknown Quaker on those pesky New Englanders (these words not mine): "The Flock of Cain."

Religion was fundamental to the colonists; and though they worshipped the same God, there was plenty of bickering. Indeed, the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, raised the ire of many colonists. The Puritans, who thought they had purged their worship of the Church of England's ritual and superstition, were still too formalistic for the Quakers. Decades before William Penn settled Pennsylvania in the 1680s, Quakers living in Rhode Island traveled to Massachusetts to rouse its benighted inhabitants from their dogmatic slumber and awaken them to the aridity of their faith. Quakers disrupted Puritan church services, heckled ministers, and even walked naked up and down the church aisles. The Friends were banned repeatedly from Massachusetts. This muted antagonism contributed in a peculiar way to the development of American liberty: Each denomination and colony was vigilant against interference in its internal affairs by others. The differences among the colonies created the presumption that each should mind its own business, and so should any potential central government.

Story Two: GORY TIMES

In 1675 – Some forty years after its founding, this training school for the ministry almost went belly up. Enrollment had dwindled to just twenty students. The school's sole assets consisted of a president's house, a small brick Indian school that was used as a printing shop, and a run-down college hall containing a library, a dormitory, and lecture rooms. Forced to face the reality of the school's "languishing and dying condition," the state legislature terminated all salaried professionals; within a month, seventeen of the twenty students had dropped out. The school went begging to the Massachusetts legislature, but to no avail: the legislature had the Indians to worry about.

In the following year, 1675, there occurred King Philip's War between the European settlers and the Indians, in which twelve towns were burned to the ground and the state incurred debts that exceeded the value of all personal property in Massachusetts. The college's future president prayed to God to cut off the head of the Indian leader; within a week his prayers were answered, and the Indian chief's head was delivered to the college, where the president-elect's son, a sophomore, took pleasure in personally removing the jaw, Gory times. That school became Harvard University. (*American History Revised* – Seymour Morris, Jr, 2010).

Story Three: Did Slavery Generate Racism, or Did Racism Generate Slavery, 1700.

Slavery, that "peculiar institution," was not peculiar to America, but what was special was the way it evolved into an institution of imagined racism according to which blacks were inferior to whites. Only in America could there emerge, as one Afro-American historian wryly put it, "the traditional idea that slaves enjoyed their situation, that Africans looked forward to traveling abroad, and what better way than a free trip on one of Her Majesty's slave ships." The first blacks to be shipped to America beginning in 1619 were not slaves but indentured servants- as were many whites. This was the practice in Europe, where indentured servants were treated with respect, often as side by side equals, with the right to go free after a fixed period of service. But unlike in Europe, land in America was plentiful and dirt-cheap, necessitating the importation of tens of thousands of indentured servants. Africa being the cheapest source of those servants, and also not protected by European laws concerning the natural rights of man, there emerged the practice of servitude for life for blacks. By the early 1700s this concept of indefinite servitude had been stretched further to incorporate the view of slaves as chattel, to be freely sold and traded by their own owners. A black man was not a man; he was inferior man – later codified in the Constitution as three-fifths of a man in apportioning votes.

In less than one hundred years, from 1619 to the early 1700s, slavery had evolved from an economic transaction to being rationalized as a legitimate if racist institution. How this could happen in a nation supposedly devoted to the ideals of freedom and liberty? Why here in America, and nowhere else in the world? The answer lies in the way slavery and cruelty enslave the master, not just the victim, and bring out the worst in people- a phenomenon witnessed later in the Nazi

treatment of Jews in World War II and the Serbian treatment of Muslims in Bosnia. Says former Princeton professor Henry Drewry:

I suggest that instead of mistreating black men because they hated them, whites may have come to hate black men because they mistreated them...On the other hand Americans were proclaiming liberty, equality, and the rights of man, and on the other they were saying they wanted a system which controlled black men and allowed whites to have blacks to do their bidding in all things whatsoever....To resolve the conflict whites rationalized that slaves were not entitled to things others were entitled to because they were somehow subhuman.

I suggest that it is not in spite of the Declaration of Independence and concern with the rights of man that slavery developed in such a peculiar way; rather, it is because of the Declaration of Independence and the beliefs in liberty and equality that American slavery developed the way it did. If an American was to believe in lofty ideals, he could not believe in them comfortably and deny them to certain men. So the only solution was to believe in these high ideals and at the same time believe that black people who were enslaved and mistreated were not men.

(*American History Revised*, Seymour Morris, Jr, 2010).