Father of Black Masonry was champion of freedom

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The colonies were ablaze with indignation. ritain, with a series of revenue acts, had stoked e fires of colonial discontent. In Virginia, Patrick enry was speaking of liberty or death. In New ork and South Carolina, in Rhode Island and aryland, Sons of Liberty were demonstrating and ycotting. Boston, the center of colonial discont, was a festering boil of boycotts, processions d bonfires. An unruly mob of Negro laborers, hite artisans, seamen and mechanics virtually ntrolled Boston streets.

Business was at a standll. Stores, offices, even urts, were closed. Night ter night, the rafters of neuil Hall rang with the passioned outbursts of traged colonists. Night ter night, men poured from reets and taverns, reaming "No Taxation ithout Representation." Moving along the edge of the tumultuous Boston crowds was a thin, delicate-looking teen-ager. His name was Prince Hall and he had just arrived from Barbados where he had been born about 1748, the son of an Englishman and a free Negro woman. Hall was, in theory, free, but he was also a Negro and he knew that neither in Boston nor in Barbados were Negroes free in fact.

PRINCE HALL

As the revolutionary drama swirled in the streets before him, Prince Hall wondered what it all meant to Puritan slaveholders. He wondered if they were sincere and if it had ever occurred to them that every principle from which they acted was "stronger than a thousand arguments in favor" of Negroes and slaves.

The audacity, the sheer effrontery, of American patriots fascinated Hall. The colonists held in servitude more than a half million human beings, some of them white; yet they proposed to go to war in support of the theory that all men were created equal.

In 1765, when Hall worked his way to Boston on a ship, there were almost 16,000 Negroes in New England — almost all of them slaves and social pariahs. In Boston proper, there were 800 Negroes, about six per cent of the population of 15,000. Prince Hall had moved around Boston with his eyes open and he was appalled by the social and economic conditions of slaves and free Negroes.

Even more appalling to the sensitive youth was the indifference of colonial patriots. Boston, at that time, was a center of the American slave trade. In one way or another, most men of substance benefited from the trade in men and the ancillary businesses that grew up around it. Most of the major leaders of the revolutionary movement, in fact, were slaveholders or investors in slave-supported businesses.

What did these men mean by freedom?

Not only Hall but thousands of other Americans were disturbed by this question. Tom Paine, James Otis, Abigail Adams and other revolutionary leaders told the colonists that their pretensions were inconsistent with their practices. Patrick Henry, an honest slaveholder, admitted that slavery was wrong but said he was "drawn along by the general inconvenience of living without them (slaves)."

What of the slaves and the free Negroes?

What did the revolutionary agitation mean to them?

Prince Hall investigated the wharves and alleys where unattached Negroes lived. He listened to their discussions and their arguments and noted, with approval, the rapid growth of political and social consciousness. There had been individual protests and collective revolts, as Prince Hall knew. But free Negroes had been strangely silent.

Now, as Hall watched, the ghetto came alive. For the first time in America, for the first time anywhere, city Negroes found a voice and a technique. Slave revolts and underground resistance had taken place outside the system. American Negroes proposed now to use the ideology and instruments of the system to smash the system.

They proposed to bore from within and destroy legal forms with legal forms. Their first technique, one that would reach full flower 194 years later, was legal contention.

In the 1760s, Prince Hall watched with burning interest as the Negro soul expanded and made its first tentative probes in enemy territory. As early as 1766, one year after Hall's arrival, Boston Negroes filed a test case against slavery. The movement spread to Connecticut and other states.

Under the leadership of men whose names were not recorded, slaves and free men collected money, hired lawyers and filed suits, asking for freedom and damages for unlawful detention. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, slave-instigated suits were appealed to the highest courts. In some courts, judges granted the pleas of slave petitioners.

Negroes, in this period, also experimented with mass pressure. Meetings were held, petitions for freedom were circulated and signed. Courts and legislatures were bombarded with petitions from Americans protesting tyranny and oppression in America.

Ingenious men found other ways to turn the revolutionary turmoil to their advantage. Some Negroes like Crispus Attucks, the leader of the crowd in the Boston Massacre, appropriated American slogans and assumed leadership in the street riots in Boston and other cities. Still others, some cynical, sided with the British.

As the agitation intensified, Negro slaves and free men became bolder. The number of slave escapes increased sharply; the number of incidents multiplied.

This first wave of agitation unfolded without conscious planning or direction. In the 1770s, however, self-conscious men who considered themselves leaders and were so considered by others stepped from the anonymity of the crowd and assumed control of men and events.

Among the most talented of these pioneer leaders was Prince Hall, who had moved for six or seven years on the edge of events, studying men and organizations.

Hall had spent his first years in Boston in study and hard work. Working as a laborer in the day and studying at night, he educated himself. Frugal and hard-headed in his business dealings, he saved enough money to buy property.

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"BALTIMORE IS A LIKEABLE PLACE"

Derek Harris, London Times journalist, sums up his opinion of Baltimore, after a two-week visit, with that statement. He adds: "In its rather quiet way, it is showing what sort of progress is possible." As evidence of Baltimore's advantages, Mrs. Harris cites:

- The Charles Center
- The Inner Harbor Development
- The New Pyrolosis Plant
- The Walters Art Gallery
- The Museum of Art
- The Maryland Institute
- The Peabody Institute
- The Pratt Library
- Johns Hopkins Hospital & University
- University of Maryland Professional Schools

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